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An ethnography of the status question and everyday politics in Puerto Rico

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Declaration of student

I declare that I have composed the present thesis and that it is entirely my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Abstract

This thesis is about the power of political elites to establish the framework of political discourse, and to thereby control political power, in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican 'status question' - the debate about the island's ultimate juridical and political relationship with the United States and the rest of the world – is considered a manifestation of such power. Formal domestic politics in Puerto Rico is structured around three party political desires for an uncertain and unknowable postcolonial future, and not around any set of distinctive ideological positions for engaging with political issues in the present. An unresolved question of nationalism and state building therefore becomes the structural filter through which all politics must necessarily pass. Inspired by the concept of hegemony, the thesis is firstly interested in how political elites exercise power to establish status as the framework for domestic political discourse. Secondly, and more importantly, it is interested in how this framework is reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through elite exercises of power in concrete political settings.

The thesis takes a particular focus on the relationship between status positions and everyday political practices in three Puerto Rican municipalities: Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares. The author arrived at this focus through an ethnographic engagement with the field that was made possible by his research positionality as a white British outsider to Puerto Rico. The thesis tells the story of the nuanced ways in which local political elites engage with the status question through practices of politics on the ground. Elite performances of local state power do not straightforwardly reproduce the hegemony of status, but rather, create a more complicated empirical terrain of contradictory, unexpected and subversive effects.

In certain places, everyday practices of municipal politics appear to reflect the intractable entanglement of local priorities and centrally prescribed status positions. In others, politics gets done in ways that leave the status question behind, creating effects that include city-state sovereignty, elevated standards of living, non-nationalist forms of politics, and non-state-centric

possibilities for decolonisation. Ironically, therefore, a political system that is so profoundly shaped by discourses of nationalism and state building is disrupted in practice by some of the very actors who help to give the system this shape. These findings contribute to critical geographies of the Caribbean and to recent debates on politics, power and decolonisation in Puerto Rico.

Lay summary

In Puerto Rico, politicians and political parties do not define themselves in terms of left and right. Instead, they organise around positions on the island's unresolved 'status question': should it become an independent country, integrate with the United States as its 51st state, or continue as an autonomous US Commonwealth? This thesis investigates how status positions influence everyday political decision-making in three Puerto Rican cities. In essence, it attempts to compare what Puerto Rican politicians say against what they actually do. It tells the story of the nuanced ways in which politicians engage with the status question through political practices on the ground. The purpose of this inquiry is to look for new ideas that could help to break, or overcome, the current deadlock between the three main status positions. Puerto Ricans have been voting ambiguously, unable to clearly decide which direction to take.

The thesis does not recommend an urgent, formal decolonisation of Puerto Rico according to any traditional option. Instead, it argues that several reforms to its existing democracy are more immediately necessary. Such reforms could in turn move Puerto Ricans towards clearer agreement about the change they want regarding their relationship with the United States and the rest of the world. These findings are of greatest relevance to the Puerto Rican people. The thesis will therefore be disseminated to the island's public university, the University of Puerto Rico, which generously hosted the author as a Visiting Scholar in 2010-11. This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom. It provides a fresh, contemporary perspective on a Caribbean island that is significantly under-researched in British universities.

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Abbreviations and other terms

PDP	The Popular Democratic Party (in Spanish: <i>Partido Popular Democrático</i>). Creators and supporters of Puerto Rico's current Commonwealth status.
<i>Populares</i>	Party members and public supporters of the PDP and Commonwealth.
PNP	The New Progressive Party (<i>Partido Nuevo Progresista</i>). Supporters of statehood for Puerto Rico (integration into the United States as the 51 st state of the union).
<i>Estadistas</i>	Party members and public supporters of the PNP and statehood. Translatable as 'statehooders'.
PIP	The Puerto Rican Independence Party (<i>Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño</i>). Supporters of independence for Puerto Rico.
<i>Independentistas</i>	Party members and public supporters of the PIP and independence.
<i>ELA</i>	The <i>Estado Libre Asociado</i> . Puerto Rico's current status as founded and advocated by the Popular Democratic Party. The dominant translation into English is 'Commonwealth'.

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The vast majority of data presented in this thesis was collected in Spanish and has been translated into English. Though I obtained Spanish-language proficiency to great personal satisfaction while conducting my research, I must take full responsibility for any instances in which I have misinterpreted an interviewee or source. All translations are mine.

This thesis is for Taína. *No te olvidaré...*

1 Introduction: the 'failure of the century'

This thesis is about the relationship between hegemonic political discourses and everyday politics in Puerto Rico. This relationship is interrogated through a focus on Puerto Rico's status issue - the ongoing question of the Caribbean island's ultimate political relationship with the United States and the rest of the world. Puerto Rico is an island where an unresolved question of nationalism and state building has become the structural filter through which all domestic politics must necessarily pass. This is because Puerto Rico's three main political parties define and differentiate themselves not in terms of socio-economic ideology, but rather, their status preferences for the island. Put another way, formal domestic politics on Puerto Rico is structured around three party political desires for an uncertain and unknowable postcolonial future, and not around any set of distinctive ideological positions for engaging with political issues in the present. Thus the New Progressive Party (PNP) advocates statehood (integration into the United States as the fifty-first federated state of the union), the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) defends autonomy (as manifested by the island's present Commonwealth relationship with the United States, a status they seek to perfect), and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) demands the establishment of an independent nation-state republic.

However, Puerto Rico is stuck. In spite of four countrywide plebiscites in 1967, 1993, 1998, and most recently in 2012, Puerto Ricans have been unable to reach a clear consensus at the ballot box about which direction to take. On each occasion the traditional status preferences of statehood, Commonwealth and independence, as advocated by the respective political parties, were presented to the voting public. Yet the electorate has repeatedly divided itself almost fifty-fifty between the Commonwealth and statehood options, with the Commonwealth status quo prevailing in 1967, 1993 and 1998, statehood taking a heavily disputed win in 2012, and independence never garnering more than four percent of the vote. Meanwhile, decades of persistent lobbying by Puerto Rican politicians of all colours in the United States Congress - the institution that

maintains Puerto Rico in a colonial relationship and thus holds the power to change it - have been totally fruitless. Faced with a lose-lose situation of plebiscite deadlock on the island and repeated shows of indifference by the powers that be on the mainland (Figure 1.1), Puerto Rican status politics has arrived at a *tranque* - the Puerto Rican slang word for 'dead-end' (Rivera Ortiz, 2001: 27). Indeed, the status issue was derided in the millennial issue of Puerto Rico's leading broadsheet as the "failure of the century" (Fernández, 2000: 100).



Figure 1.1: *¡Yo no comprende español!* Newspaper cartoon depicting a PNP leader's insistence that Obama resolve the status issue, but the president claims not to understand. (Source: *El Vocero*, 2010)

This thesis searches for the possible ways for Puerto Ricans to move beyond the *tranque*. It does so by investigating how the structural dominance of status translates into everyday practices in Puerto Rico's domestic political system. While status dominates the island's political structure, how - if at all - is it manifested in political practice? Such a task is important for three reasons.

First, and quite simply, it offers an original line of enquiry into an otherwise exhausted debate. Second, it provides an empirical contribution to new ideas advanced by Puerto Rican political authors who are finally reflecting on the importance of status. Third, and most significantly, the results of this enquiry have the political potential to transform current understandings of the terms and significance of the Puerto Rican status question. On the one hand, it might discover that there are ways to make status more relevant - that is, to disrupt the stalemate and move the issue forward. On the other, it might reveal an equally significant but rather more subversive conclusion about the need to reimagine Puerto Rican politics beyond status entirely.

Deploying an ethnographic research strategy in three field sites, this thesis uncovers evidence in support of both propositions. It tells the story of the nuanced ways in which political elites engage with the status question through practices of politics on the ground. In certain places, the concrete efforts of political elites to move Puerto Rico towards new forms of consensus on status reflect the intractable entanglement of local political priorities and status positions. In other places, politics gets done in ways that leave the status question behind, despite the external filter of status on politics in Puerto Rico. Ironically, therefore, a political system that is so profoundly shaped by discourses of nationalism and state building is disrupted in practice by some of the very actors who help to give the system this shape. The practice of politics in a non-nationalist framework shows that it is possible to overcome political imaginations that are bound up in the discourses of Commonwealth, statehood or independence.

1.1 Research questions

The primary research question of this thesis is the following:

1. *What is the relationship between the structural dominance of the status question and everyday politics in Puerto Rico?*

The thesis aims to question how Puerto Rican politicians' declared wishes for their people, as manifested in their status preferences, translate into their everyday political work. In this respect it is a relatively simple question of comparing what Puerto Rican politicians say against what they actually do. However, that this question has gone almost universally ignored in the literature reveals the dominant and largely unchallenged position of status in most accounts of Puerto Rican politics. In Puerto Rico, status and politics are virtually synonymous. As a result, status has served to block alternative understandings of politics and severely limited the number of studies that take them seriously, let alone assess their significance relative to status. With its focus on everyday practices of governance and decision-making, the above research question aims to rectify this situation.

The primary research question is supported by two secondary questions:

2. *Where and how do positions on status influence everyday politics?*

In order to answer the main research question the project first identifies relevant institutional locations for investigating the relationship between status position and political action. It is about grounding status in a concrete domestic political context. This is achieved firstly by tracing the hegemonic discourses of status to their institutional bases: the three main political parties. The thesis then argues that the municipalities - the administrative and territorial divisions of the local state - present the ideal scale to investigate the relationship between hegemonic party political discourses and the practices of politicians on the ground.

3. *How do new perspectives on the relationship between status and everyday politics transform the terms and significance of the status debate, and develop our understanding of the relationship between hegemonic discourses and political practice?*

This question draws upon the principal findings of the thesis to reconsider the political significance of the status question and related positions, and advance new ideas about how the *tranque* might be overcome. Specifically, the municipalities are, to a degree, able to subvert issues of nationalism and state building in the pursuit of alternative political agendas that forge more direct connections to the material politics of everyday settings. The thesis therefore recommends no status option, nor indeed any immediate status change, but rather modest reforms to Puerto Rico's existing representative democracy to encourage these alternative forms of politics. Structural improvements to Puerto Rican democracy in the short and medium-term could ultimately lead to new forms of popular consensus on the status issue beyond deadlocked partisan positions. Moreover, they could pluralise the debate beyond mere concerns of the central state to more clearly articulate the implications of different ideas about reorganising state power for cities, municipalities and communities.

1.2 Thesis structure

To build this argument, the thesis is divided into the following six chapters:

Chapter Two discusses the literature drawn upon by the thesis. In particular, it demonstrates the importance of understanding the Puerto Rican status question in the context of debates on hegemony, discourse, performance and power; on the geographies of politics; and on conceptions of the political. This chapter contextualises the above research questions and explains their pertinence in terms of the shortcomings, challenges and unfilled research gaps of the existing scholarship on Puerto Rican politics. Indeed, the present research enters at a crucial moment where a growing number of Puerto Rican intellectuals are critiquing the traditional framing of the debate from a variety of perspectives, in the process turning "the question of status" into "the status of the question" (Negrón-Muntaner, 2007: 1). Moreover, to the author's knowledge no work has been completed about Puerto Rico from a UK

perspective - in any discipline - since Peter Jackson's (1980) PhD thesis *A Social Geography of Puerto Ricans in New York*.

Chapter Three explains how I developed the thesis' research questions and arrived at a focus on the municipal scale of Puerto Rican politics to answer them. This involved an ethnographic research strategy of extended overseas fieldwork, allowing for immersion into the puzzle of Puerto Rican politics, language learning, and a search for an original yet politically productive line of enquiry. It underlines that researching Puerto Rican politics presents significant epistemological challenges. However, I negotiated these challenges as a white British 'outsider' to Puerto Rico, where I was positioned advantageously within a regional Caribbean mindset that facilitated my progress in practical and intellectual ways.

Chapter Four draws upon pilot data from central political leaders in order to demonstrate that hegemony is evident in the Puerto Rican status question. It establishes that Puerto Rico's party political structure is built around competing ideas about political affiliation - ultimately, nationalism and state building. It explains how the parties attempt to set the status question as the framework for political discourse in Puerto Rico. Moreover, it reveals that the efforts of political elites to set this framework obscure their own interests to dominate domestic political power. It also discusses the structure of formal municipal politics and explains its potential to empower local political actors to reinforce, modify, resist and even overcome centrally prescribed status positions.

Chapter Five notes that positions on status appear to be relevant to the political practices of three municipalities: Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares. Here local political elites have implemented material changes to the everyday, lived environment of the municipalities in order to bring into being and normalise discourses of Puerto Rican identity that are consistent with their status positions. They are seen to exercise local power in ways that have resulted in the reinforcement, reinterpretation and resistance of different perspectives on status. The case studies therefore demonstrate that status is not a

predetermined aspect of Puerto Rican reality but rather constitutive of hegemonic discourses that are routinely brought into being and negotiated through performances in material space.

Chapter Six examines in greater depth the relationship between status positions and the structures and everyday practices of politics in the municipalities. It notes that the mayors of Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares exercise their local powers according to a range of ideologies and priorities. Nonetheless, local political agendas become significantly entangled with centrally prescribed status positions through routine practices in the municipal executives. Such entanglements create a complicated empirical terrain of effects that do not simply reproduce hegemonic status positions but also contradict and subvert them in unexpected ways.

Chapter Seven considers that the everyday politics of Puerto Rican municipalities mount conceptual and practical challenges to the salience of formal political status. Conceptually, certain municipalities subvert the ontological scales that constitute the status question – the central state and nation-state – by harnessing decentralisation and responding to globalisation. Practically, the performance of decentralised power in the municipalities has created a series of effects that only a status resolution is supposed to make possible, according to dominant political discourses in Puerto Rico. These effects include city-state sovereignty, elevated standards of living, and even decolonisation.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. The entanglements of local politics and status politics in the Puerto Rican municipalities would appear to suggest that the status question matters. However, to a degree the municipalities are able to leave status behind by practicing non-nationalist forms of politics principally focused on the material conditions of lived and everyday settings. The thesis recommends structural reforms to deepen and expand non-nationalist politics in Puerto Rico. Ultimately, this might destabilise currently deadlocked partisan positions on status and lead to a new popular consensus beyond them. The author presents these ideas not to ridicule or discredit any

Puerto Rican political institution, status position or individual politician - which is so often the tone of existing writings on Puerto Rican politics - but rather to offer an analysis that an outsider is optimally positioned to offer. Puerto Rican politics currently suffers from a particular predisposition that precludes the ability of many people to see things in a different way.

1.3 Background to Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico is located in the centre of the Caribbean Sea, east of the Dominican Republic and west of the Lesser Antilles chain (Figure 1.2). Its land area stretches approximately 100 miles from east to west and 35 miles from north to south. With a population of 3.72 million, Puerto Rico is one of the most densely populated areas of the world, with 1,088 inhabitants per square mile (US Census Bureau, 2012a: 32). Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain for 400 years from 1493 until 1898, when the United States invaded the island during the Spanish-American War. Three years later Puerto Rico's status was established as a 'non-incorporated territory' of the United States subject to the Territorial Clause of the US Constitution. According to this clause, effective to this day, Puerto Rico "belongs to but is not part of the United States" (Duany, 2005: 7). As such the US Constitution and Bill of Rights do not apply in their entirety to the island (Task Force, 2011: 17). In 1952, Puerto Rico became a US Commonwealth (in Spanish, *Estado Libre Asociado*, or 'Free Associated State'), an ambiguous, semi-autonomous status that granted the island a local constitution and powers over most local matters, including culture, language, education, taxation and housing.



Figure 1.2: Location of Puerto Rico. (Source: García, 2011)

Under the Commonwealth arrangement the US Federal Government retains jurisdiction over most state affairs, including foreign relations and trade, currency, citizenship, customs and immigration, defence, and courts. All federal laws apply to Puerto Rico. Moreover, Puerto Rico continues to be subjected to the Territorial Clause of the US Constitution despite its semi-autonomous status (Smith, 2007: 279). Puerto Ricans have been US citizens since 1917. However, since Puerto Rico is not a state, its residents cannot vote for the president nor send a delegation of representatives or senators to US Congress. They are entitled to a range of federal government programs, but the island's unique juridical status as a non-incorporated territory permits Congress to treat Puerto Rico unequally in this regard compared with the states of the union (Cabrane, 1986: 453). This said, as US citizens Puerto Ricans may freely travel to and establish residency in any of the 50 states, and thereby enjoy the full rights of living in a state. Indeed nearly 5 million Puerto Ricans currently live in the United States, making the diaspora significantly greater than the island population (US Census Bureau, 2012b). Puerto Rico has one non-voting representative in Congress known as the Resident Commissioner. English exists

alongside Spanish as an official language, but it is estimated that only 18% of the population speaks it fluently (Pousada, 2008: 138).

Politics in Puerto Rico is structured by passionate and tireless debate about the ambiguities and contradictions of the island's present juridical condition. However, at the same time Puerto Ricans face considerable domestic challenges, including metropolitan economic dependency, poverty, crime, unemployment, population decrease, and governmental corruption. While in 2009 the island's pro-statehood Resident Commissioner saw a positive atmosphere in US Congress to push the status issue, calling it "an alignment of the stars" (Caribbean Business, 2009: 22), many political commentators have considered the "collective obsession" of status (Toro, 2008: 37) a constant distraction from more immediate socio-economic and institutional problems. Notably, close to 50% of Puerto Ricans depend upon food stamps, housing, university scholarships and other federal benefits (Rivera Ortiz, 2009: 51), around half of all families on the island fall below the federal poverty level and receive federal food stamps (Pantojas-García, 2007: 208), and per capita income is one third that of the mainland (Task Force, 2011: 4). Unemployment on the island reached 16.9% in 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013) and a year earlier its labour force participation rate was 43.2%, the lowest in the world (Hernández Colón, 2009b: 23).

Puerto Rico has been in economic recession since 2006 (Harvard-MIT Puerto Rican Caucus, 2008: 44). Brain drain to the United States resulted in a population decrease of 2.2% between 2010 and 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2012a: 25). The per capita murder rate is currently six times that of the United States (Greene, 2013). In 2010 the FBI conducted its largest ever police corruption raid, rounding up 90 members of the Puerto Rico Police Department with suspected links to drug trafficking (Melia, 2010). Given the predominance of status issues in Puerto Rico, politicians often interpret these serious domestic problems through the lens of their status positions. This thesis is interested to consider the ways in which status positions might also inform the solutions that are implemented in practice.

2 The status question, politics and scale in Puerto Rican scholarship

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is about the power to establish the framework of political discourse, and to thereby control political power, in Puerto Rico. Specifically, it examines the processes through which the island's status question has come to determine this framework, and considers the ways in which it is reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through exercises of power in everyday political settings. The present chapter provides a summary and analysis of the literature that is pertinent to this interrogation. The first section outlines the theoretical approach of the thesis, which is formed of ideas on discourse, hegemony, performance, everyday politics and power. The chapter is then structured around broader debates in Caribbean studies, social sciences and geography that importantly contextualise the adopted theoretical approach. These sections engage with current scholarship on Puerto Rican status from multiple disciplines in order to highlight a number of research gaps that the thesis is able to usefully fill.

The first section details the theoretical framework. The second section briefly identifies where this thesis sits in the context of recent Caribbeanist literatures and scholarship on geographies of the Caribbean. The third section notes that most scholars of Puerto Rico contribute to the hegemony of status by rooting it in a dichotomy of two related discourses that are also hegemonic: colonialism and nationalism. The fourth section reviews traditional and progressive approaches to the relationships between politics, scale and the state in geography and social science. It does so to highlight that the hegemony of status question has skewed understandings of these relationships in the Puerto Rican literature, with most writings prioritising the scalar units of nation, state and nation-state as the containers of political power.

The fifth section reviews traditional and progressive understandings of what constitutes politics in geography and the social sciences. It goes on to

explain that the status question has come to dominate understandings of politics and the political in Puerto Rico. The chapter concludes by noting that the dominance of the status question has not, remarkably, been matched by academic research into it. Some scholars have started to challenge the framework set by questions of status and, in the process, the power relations that its hegemony maintains. Given that this exciting new work is mostly theoretical, the present thesis aims to provide some important empirical grounding.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Conceptually, this thesis is interested in how hegemonic discourses are reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through performed practices in lived and everyday contexts. It takes a focus on the varied, everyday performances of power through which hegemony works in Puerto Rico. The island's status question is understood as a manifestation of hegemony. This is because status clearly reflects the power of Puerto Rican political elites to establish the framework for domestic political discourse. The thesis considers status a debate in which three different party political visions of state power – as represented by the status positions of statehood, Commonwealth and independence – struggle and compete for hegemony. It asks how these state visions are reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through everyday practices of politics in concrete settings. Using case studies of the everyday practices of local political elites in three municipal sites, the thesis looks to demonstrate that elite performances of state power do not straightforwardly reproduce the hegemony of status, but rather, create a more complicated empirical terrain of contradictory, unexpected and subversive effects. The purpose of this interrogation is to look for new ideas to break, or overcome, the current deadlock of formal status politics in Puerto Rico. Ideas on discourse, hegemony, performance, everyday politics and power form the theoretical framework of the thesis, and are detailed below.

2.2.1 *Discourse and hegemony*

The Puerto Rican status question may be usefully conceptualised as a discourse. Discourse is language that creates and shapes the structures of meaning through which the world is interpreted. According to theories of discourse, language does not transparently represent a pre-existing reality, but rather, actively produces it “via practices of interpretation deploying different modes of representation” (Campbell, 2009: 166). In this way, discourses “shape the contours of the taken-for-granted world, naturalising and universalising a particular subject formation and view of the world” (2009: 167). Foucault writes about ‘regimes of truth’ as the mechanisms and techniques that produce discourses which function as ‘true’ in particular times and places. As he puts it, “each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991: 75). ‘Truth’ and ‘general politics’ are created and maintained by dominant groups who exercise the majority of power in a society through institutions. In this way, “truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it” (1991: 74). As a starting point, the status question may therefore be considered a discourse that is created and maintained by powerful groups in Puerto Rico to sustain the appearance of particular realities and truths.

Hegemony is a useful concept for developing an understanding of how particular discourses manage to predominate in a society over alternative interpretations of reality. Antonio Gramsci (1973) theorised hegemony as the power of a dominant group “to *persuade* subordinate classes to accept its moral, political, and cultural values as the ‘natural’ order” (Jackson, 1989: 53; emphasis added). Hegemony refers to the power of persuasion, as opposed to the power of coercion through physical force, to achieve control: “hegemonic controls involve a set of ideas and values that the majority are persuaded to adopt as their own” (Kong and Law, 2002: 1505). In this way particular ideologies are portrayed as ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’ for the majority. When control is

successful, the social order endorsed by the elite is the very same that the masses desire. The concept of hegemony deepens an understanding of the Puerto Rican status question as a *hegemonic* discourse – a framing device or lens through which elite groups have persuaded the majority to think and look. As Peet (2007: 13) neatly puts it: “There is a special class thinking up and spreading dominant modes of thought. We should know who they are”. In Puerto Rico, continued ambiguities at the ballot box indicate that no one status position has successfully secured hegemony. However, the thesis contends that the performance of competing status discourses, and their resulting tensions, entanglements and interdependencies, serve to cement as hegemonic the status question itself.

The thesis departs from Gramsci and adopts a more nuanced understanding of hegemony beyond a simple Marxist binary of elite domination and non-elite resistance. It is inspired by Peet’s (2007) distinction between hegemony, sub-hegemony and counter-hegemony. This provides a useful framework for understanding the varied ways in which Puerto Rico’s local political elites negotiate status positions as established centrally by the political parties. Hegemony, in Peet’s (2007: 22) words, is the discursive production of “power centres formed by institutional complexes”. The thesis considers the three main political parties to be power centres. Sub-hegemony refers to the actions of “peripheral centres of power”, which “translate received discourses, modify and add to ideas, and provide evidence of their validity through regional practice” (2007: 22). The thesis understands Puerto Rico’s municipal governments as peripheral centres of power. As the case studies shall demonstrate, mayors are able to refashion status discourses received from their parties centrally to create alternate effects that may be considered sub-hegemonic. Finally, counter-hegemony refers to “centres, institutions and movements founded on opposing political beliefs that contend against the conventional, and advocate policy alternatives” (2007: 22). The thesis is interested in political elites rather than non-elites in the context of sub-hegemony and counter-hegemony. Indeed, elites are still able to produce

counter-hegemonic effects by resisting discourses of the centre. The potential for counter-hegemony shall be demonstrated in one case study, where local political elites are seen to contest the centrally prescribed status position of their own party.

2.2.2 *Performance, performativity and everyday politics*

This thesis is inspired by theories of performance. Such approaches contend that social phenomena, identities and space are not prefigured and determinate but produced or brought into being through everyday practices. Ontologically, social life does not pre-exist its performance. Therefore, as Thrift (2003: 2021) puts it, “the world is not a reflection but a continuous composition”. It is in the realm of the everyday – the “ordinary, routine and repetitive aspects of social life that are pervasive and yet frequently overlooked and taken-for-granted” (Pinder, 2008: 223) – that the world is produced and reproduced. Space is also understood to be constituted through performances. As such, “performances do not take place in already existing locations... Specific performances bring these places into being” (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 441). These ideas deepen an understanding of the status question as not a fixed or predetermined aspect of Puerto Rican reality but rather a hegemonic discourse that is brought into being through its persistent production and reproduction in lived and everyday contexts, and in material space.

While performance principally focuses on practices (what is actually said, done or acted out), ideas of performativity are interested in their potentially varied effects. Performativity considers that hegemonic discourses are never perfectly reproduced through performances, but rather, are modified and even subverted. This is because ‘slippage’ always occurs between “actual performances... and the norms/ideals that they cite” (Pratt, 2008: 525). Performativity conceives of performances as ‘citational’ – that is, historically embedded in past utterances and discourses which are repeated. However, the discrepancy between the performance and the cited source opens up space for

subversion, rupture, agency, and the constitution of new strategies.

Performativity therefore “pertains to the citational practices which produce *and subvert* discourse and knowledge” (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 433; emphasis added). In sum, the performative refers to the ‘doing’ of discourse and its potentially varied effects (Crouch, 2003: 1947). The thesis looks to demonstrate the relevance of these ideas by detailing how the practices of local Puerto Rican political elites do not straightforwardly reproduce hegemonic status discourses, but rather create, in a performative way, a more complicated empirical terrain of contradictory, unexpected and subversive effects.

The thesis theorises the practices of local political elites in terms of ideas on ‘everyday politics’. Everyday politics refers to “the ways in which official politics enters and permeates the local and everyday (and vice versa)” (Rigg, 2007: 144). These interactions between official and everyday politics take place through “the quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that indirectly and for the most part privately endorse, modify or resist prevailing procedures, rules, regulations or order” (Kerkvliet, 2005; in Rigg, 2007: 144). Adapting these ideas to Puerto Rico, this thesis searches for possible intersections between the ‘official politics’ of centrally prescribed status positions and the routine practices of Puerto Rican political actors at the municipal scale of government. This adaptation takes a view of everyday politics that encompasses the ordinary decision-making of Puerto Rican politicians within the structures of the local state. Everyday politics conceives of decision-making as a performed, mundane practice through which hegemonic discourses, as set from the centre, are reinforced, reworked, contested, and even bypassed or overcome. Theoretically, therefore, the thesis contends that local political practices in Puerto Rico could have real implications for the salience and significance of status positions, and by extension, the status question itself.

2.2.3 *Power*

The concept of power importantly bridges the above concepts of discourse, hegemony, performance, performativity and everyday politics.¹ According to theories of discourse, power is not fixed and simply possessed in a hierarchy of individuals, groups or institutions from most to least powerful, but exercised. Discourses, and by extension hegemony, flow through the exercise of power (Gaventa, 2003). Dominant groups and institutions exercise power in an attempt to secure hegemony for their discourses. Power may be exercised in negative and positive ways – negatively in the sense of coercion or repression, and positively in the sense of production or persuasion, as per hegemony (Sharp et al, 2000: 2). Power is exercised through performances; which is to say, through everyday practices. As such, everyday practice is fundamental to the workings of power (Thrift, 2000a). By extrapolation, the reinforcements, modifications, resistances and subversions of discourse that take place in the realm of the everyday are also defining aspects of power. For example, Thrift (2000b: 384) notes that geopolitical stances, national identities and forms of governance are brought into being and reinforced through the “smallest of details” and “mundane citations” in everyday life. Everyday resistances and subversions are equally significant:

All powerful systems are constantly being undermined by the undertow of everyday practice, not least because they themselves consist of everyday practices. Though they can call on various forms of technology to make them more durable, they cannot transcend other ontological skills... Almost as a matter of routine people slide around these systems. (Thrift, 2000a: 270)

By investigating the relationship between status positions and everyday political practice, this thesis explores the complex ways in which power works in Puerto Rico. It is inspired by two particular theories of power that help

¹ While it is not the purpose of this chapter to explain the distinction and interactions between hegemony and performativity in depth, such a discussion can be found in Butler et al (2000).

explain the interactions of status positions and everyday politics: Allen's (2004) relational account of power and Sharp et al's (2000) entanglements of power.

Allen's (2004) relational account of power understands that decision-makers in institutions 'beneath' the central state (according to a hierarchical understanding of state power) are in practice able to strategically work around or beyond it through their own power exercises. In his words, power is about "the cross-cutting nature of governing relationships as different bodies, partners and organisations mediate the decision-making process, mobilising resources independently of any central authority" (2004: 24). This definition reflects the current trend of theorising the everyday governing processes of political institutions as 'governance'. Governance attempts to "broaden 'government' beyond the strictly delineated world of nation-state action" (Larner, 2011: 338) - as per state-centric forms of political power - in order to consider "the growing involvement of private and third sector actors in a diverse range of activities once conventionally associated with the state" (2011: 338). The thesis considers the Puerto Rican municipality not merely a 'site' of held local power but rather a potential "honeycomb for politics" where the mayor, legislators, executive directors and non-governmental actors "can themselves mobilise to intervene, interrupt or modify the translatable goals of government" through power exercises (Allen, 2004: 24). As will be shown empirically, everyday Puerto Rican politics therefore brings into focus the structures and practices of power that reinforce, contest, complicate and even overcome the aspirations to central state-building that constitute all status positions.

Sharp et al's (2000) theory of power contends that processes of domination and resistance do not exist in a simple binary opposition to one another, as per orthodox accounts of power, but are inherently 'entangled'. "Domination and resistance cannot exist independently of each other... the one always contain[s] the seeds of the other, the one always bear[s] at least a trace of the other that contaminates or subverts it" (2000: 20). This version of power attempts to provide a more nuanced account of the varied effects of power in

shaping social life – or as Sharp et al (2000: 2) put it, “more grounded commentaries alert to the chaotic muddle of empirical situations”. This thesis is particularly interested in the implications of these ideas for theorising the state. Within the modern state, power relations are not determined by a static hierarchy of institutions or individuals but rather the coming together of “a range of different branches, interests and agents, each of which tends to operate with different agendas, support networks and constituents” (2000: 7). Processes of domination and resistance, and their effects of inscription, reinterpretation, contradiction and subversion, are therefore inherent to the workings of state power. Moreover, entanglements of power are fundamentally spatial since they are “really, crucially and unavoidably spun out across and through the material spaces of the world” (2000: 24).

Inspired by these ideas, the thesis shall demonstrate that the Puerto Rican municipalities – the administrative and political units of the local state – are material sites where state power is intractably entangled. Using empirical case studies, it shows how elite performances of power in the municipalities connect to local concerns and hegemonic central positions at the same time. Centrally prescribed status positions and local political agendas do not exist independently of one another in everyday Puerto Rican politics; rather, they are seen to interact in ambiguous ways, and create a handful of contradictory, unexpected and subversive effects. The chapter now moves on from the theoretical framework to discuss where this thesis sits within current literatures on Caribbean studies and Caribbean geographies.

2.3 Caribbean context

This thesis arrives at a moment where the intellectual focus of Caribbean studies has shifted well beyond anti-colonial approaches primarily interested in issues of nation and state building, as informed by the so-called “wave of decolonisation” that swept the region after the Second World War (Oostindie and Kilnkers, 2003: 9). Instead, it is inspired by the more recent development

of postcolonial approaches in Caribbean societies, which seek to expose and challenge the continuation of colonial power relations after formal independence and critique grand narratives of progress and history (Walcott, 1995; Lamming, 2002). Of interest to the thesis are ideas from the region on hegemony (Hall, 1987); the possibilities of counter-hegemonic resistance (Meeks, 2000); and new understandings of decolonisation (Girvan, 2010; Meeks, 2003; Nettleford, 2003).

Moreover, this research takes place in a contemporary context in which insular Caribbean nation-states face a series of 'existential threats' (Girvan, 2011) in the form of global economic, social, cultural and environmental pressures that undermine their viability and territorial integrity. This corresponds to the predominance of regional and transnational institutions over governance in the Caribbean, such that "insular independence has become largely shambolic and economic sovereignty an illusion" in a global era (2011: 21). What is more, the priorities of the United States - the hegemonic power in the region - have shifted from military concerns informed by the Cold War to a 'post-9/11' scenario focused on security, drug trafficking and illegal immigration (Pantojas-García and Klak, 2004). The power of central states in the Caribbean is further brought into question by a growing consensus, in both independent and non-independent societies, of the need to "empower local communities through the increased devolution of central government functions" (Benn and Hall, 2003: xii).

The thesis is therefore particularly inspired by new thoughts on decolonisation beyond state sovereignty, as informed by postcolonial experiences in the English-speaking Caribbean. The endurance of multiple colonial legacies after formal independence has led to a proliferation of non-state-centric ideas about reversing the region's continued cultural, economic and epistemic dependency on the metropolitan world. For example, Meeks (2003: 176) calls for a cultural decolonisation based on a pan-Caribbean solidarity - a "Caribbean psychic and geographical space" - to strengthen individual and collective self-confidence as a basis for new counter-hegemonic

economic projects. It is now accepted that decolonisation crucially involves local scale strategies that develop the economic autonomy of communities in a global context (Girvan, 2001), with decentralisation and participatory governance advanced as ways of decolonising divisive national political cultures (Nettleford, 2003). More widely, decolonisation has been rethought as an intellectual or epistemic project to escape colonial ways of thinking (Lamming, 2001; Girvan, 2010). Such work underlines the necessity of using indigenous ideas over "flawed conceptualisations based on 'imported' formulations" (2010: 6) to understand Caribbean politics, economics, society and culture.

Importantly, the present research adds to a currently small body of literature on governance and the prospects of political change in the non-independent Caribbean (Clegg and Pantojas-García, 2009; Gamaliel Ramos and Rivera Ortiz, 2001). These works examine how territories of the region are facing the challenges of globalisation through an unusual set of governance arrangements. Despite the losses of sovereignty experienced by their formally independent neighbours, a consensus has formed in the literature around the continued salience of political status issues and state power in non-independent societies. Sovereign free association is commonly mooted as the most realistic option, offering a 'best of both worlds' autonomous arrangement of sovereign powers for meeting global economic challenges while retaining the economic and political advantages of metropolitan protection (Sutton, 2007). However, this literature fails to consider the possible implications of debates on globalisation, decentralisation and the erosion of nation-state integrity for the relevance of the political status question itself - namely, its ultimate framing around tropes of national and territorial sovereignty. This thesis attempts, in part, to contribute to a new discussion along these lines.

Further, the present research contributes to the growing literature on critical geographies of the Caribbean (Kingsbury and Sletto, 2005). These take a particular interest in how forms of governance and island-state sovereignty are being rescaled in response to discourses of neoliberalism and globalisation in the region (Sheller, 2009). For example, Klak (1998: 12, 15) documents the

region's "economic and political marginalisation" and the "reduced sovereignty of the state relative to capital" as a result of the neoliberal agendas of supranational development institutions including the WTO and IMF. Newstead (2009) observes that power has been rescaled beyond the nation-state in the form of CARICOM, a regional institution of political, economic and social regulation that overcomes the "persistent statism" of its members (2009: 158). The rescaling of governance has led to new forms of local politics beyond the state involving multiple interest groups, such as participatory development (see below). Attention has also been paid to the disruptive effect of diasporic experience and return migration on fixed understandings of nationalism in the Caribbean, as citizens become transnational and broaden their political, social and economic affinities beyond one nation-state or territory (Conway et al, 2008; Howard, 2003). In sum, geographers of the Caribbean are sensitive to the reality that major decision-making processes, and movements of people, exceed the national scale and involve regional and transnational actors.

In particular, the thesis contributes to a large body of works within Caribbean studies and Caribbean geographies interested in participatory forms of development (Nettleford, 2003; Meeks, 2000; Pugh and Potter, 2003; Pugh and Momsen, 2006). This is because everyday politics in one of the presented case studies takes place within a local political structure based on ideas of participatory governance. As will be shown, the performance of participatory discourses in this site is related to elite political positions on the Puerto Rican status question. Participatory approaches to development are currently fashionable in the Caribbean and Global South. Indeed, their rise to prominence in the last two decades has marked a so-called 'participatory turn' in development practice (Sletto, 2005: 77). Channelling this discourse, Caribbeanist intellectuals see opportunities to devolve the "asphyxiating power of the centre" (Meeks, 2000: 170) to community-based organisations, and to rethink government as a hub for the coming together of partners from the private sector, non-governmental organisations and communities (Nettleford, 2003).

Geographers of the Caribbean have paid significant attention to participatory development. They consider the ways in which participatory planning discourses have been adopted, shaped and appropriated in different contexts (Pugh and Potter, 2003). While such strategies are ostensibly 'bottom-up', championing community empowerment and democratic consensus-building amongst multiple interest groups, it is noted they are often ironically 'top-down' in practice (Momsen, 2006: 1). According to Pugh and Potter (2003: 17), this is because planning is usually context-neutral and "'imposed' upon a complex set of power relations without much appreciation of how those contextual relations work in practice".

Geographers therefore argue that participatory development initiatives rarely disrupt hierarchical structures and relations of power in Caribbean democracies. In fact, they have been seen to actively maintain them, since participatory discourses can be co-opted by local and national political elites to build up and recentralise their formal state power (Pelling, 1999; Pugh, 2006). Participatory development has been further criticised for maintaining the hegemony of Western, neoliberal notions of progress in the region according to structural adjustment policies and moves to roll back the state (Pugh, 2003). In sum, participatory development in the Caribbean has often become rhetoric that masks the exclusion of marginalised groups from decision-making (Pelling, 1998: 469). The present case study in Puerto Rico shall make a small contribution to these debates by considering how ideas about participatory democracy have been appropriated by local political elites in a likely attempt to secure hegemony for discourses related to particular status positions.

Unfortunately, geographers have paid very little attention to Puerto Rico, nor to the non-independent Caribbean more widely. The most notable recent exception is a special edition of *Southeastern Geographer* collated by researchers from the University of Puerto Rico, which takes a mostly economic focus on the spread of US chain stores across the island (Guilbe, 2009), the globalisation of retail activities (Tillman, 2009), and the proliferation of gated communities (García-Ellín, 2009). This research therefore responds to a recent

call for more research on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, an area that is significantly underrepresented in the existing literature on Caribbean geographies (Torres, 2005: 171).² More specifically, there is an opportunity for geographers to consider the political implications of spatial rescalings in the region for status questions in the non-independent Caribbean. Given that formal state sovereignty that has proven a "mirage" (Ramphal, 2009: i) for many of their neighbours, have the territories found ways to bypass status entirely by finding non-state-centric solutions to decolonisation?

2.4 Hegemonic discourses in Puerto Rico

This section demonstrates that the status question has become a dominant discourse that frames much work on Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans from a variety of perspectives. In order to understand how this happens, it is necessary to outline two related discourses – colonialism and nationalism - that form the binary within which status is traditionally understood. This is evidenced in the way status is described interchangeably as Puerto Rico's "colonial question" (Laó, 1997: 172) or its "national question" (Manuel Carrión, 1993: 68). Beyond status, the colonialism/nationalism binary has been used to explain multiple aspects of Puerto Rican experience. The effect of this condition, in Ríos Ávila (2007: 247) words, is that "it is now commonplace to start any inquiry into things Puerto Rican by invoking the island's ambiguous political status as a Commonwealth: political colonialism versus cultural nationalism".

Most scholars of Puerto Rico agree that the island is a colony of the United States "in the classical sense of being politically and economically subordinated to another country" (Duany, 2005: 6). The principal reason for this is well known: political sovereignty over Puerto Rico resides in US Congress. This was confirmed by an infamous decision of the US Supreme Court in 1901 that the island legally "belongs to but is not part of the United States" (2005: 7).

² An important exception is Howard's (2007; 2001) work on the role of racism and discrimination in state governance and the construction of national identity in the Dominican Republic.

In Puerto Rico colonialism has therefore become a "simple and perfectly useful word" describing "a relationship between a powerful metropolitan state and a poor overseas dependency that does not participate meaningfully in the formal lawmaking processes that shape the daily lives of its people" (Cabranes, 2001: 40-1). Puerto Rican scholars commonly lament the continuation of colonialism on the island. For example, Malavet (2002: 421) finds it "utterly astonishing that this one-hundred-year-old colonial captivity endures". Trías Monge (1997: 107) goes further back to the four hundred years of Spanish occupation before the US invasion to describe Puerto Rico as "the oldest colony in the world". In sum, the discourse of colonialism has assumed a hegemonic presence in Puerto Rico. As Flores (2000: 35) puts it: "though it carries a seemingly endless array of meanings, and the formulas for challenging it span the full range of political options, the word *colony*, or its connotations, resonates virtually unchallenged in Puerto Rican public life".

Nationalism has been cemented as a second dominant discourse in Puerto Rico, in binary opposition to colonialism. Nationalism is commonly framed as the "cure" to the "disease" of colonialism (Quiroga, 1997: 116). The starting point for Puerto Rican nationalism is the overwhelming consensus, both popular and academic, that Puerto Rico is a nation. As Duany (2000: 8) notes, Puerto Rico fulfils most of the traditional criteria for nationhood – a shared language, territory, culture and history – less political sovereignty. Two different forms of nationalism are posited as the cures for Puerto Rico's colonial condition: political nationalism and cultural nationalism. Political nationalists argue that independence is the logical culmination of Puerto Rican nationhood and the way to definitively end colonialism. The context of "yankee imperialism" (Enamorado-Cuesta, 1966: 2) presents the Puerto Rican nation with a straightforward dilemma of "liberty or domination" (Sánchez Tarniella, 1973: 4). Political nationalists also contend that Puerto Ricans face an existential dilemma of "cultural assimilation versus national consciousness" (Maldonado-Denis, 1972: 130). In this view, independence is the only way to

safeguard Puerto Rico's national distinctiveness in the face of "North American cultural aggression" (Méndez, 1980:1).

Puerto Rican cultural nationalists agree with political nationalists on the existence and traits of a national collective, but disagree about its necessary political destiny. Cultural nationalists contend that the Puerto Rican nation is fully expressed within Commonwealth status, while political nationalists go further to "equate the nation with the state" (Duany, 2007: 53). Cultural nationalism was one of the PDP's landmark policies after founding the Commonwealth in 1952. Dávila (1997: 61) notes that the party created an "institutional structure geared at combating colonialism through the enhancement of Puerto Rican culture". The PDP therefore attempts to convince Puerto Ricans that "the struggle for independence is not a necessary condition for the construction of a national identity" (Pantojas-García, 2005: 174). The pro-statehood position, represented by the PNP, usually argues that Puerto Rico is not a nation but rather a 'cultural identity' within the US nation that would be fully protected under a 'creole statehood' (Meléndez, 1991: 136).

The predominance of colonial and national discourses cements the hegemony of the status question in Puerto Rico. First, colonial discourse reinforces status by constructing it as the mechanism for ending colonialism. The continued existence of the question therefore signifies the continued existence of colonialism. In Meléndez's (1991: 122) words, "Puerto Rico's 'status issue' is the euphemism used to name the island's colonial problem". Second, discourses on nationalism cement the status question by constructing it as a fundamental debate on national identity. Therefore, consensus has emerged that different status options have significant consequences for definitions of 'Puerto Ricanness' (Morris, 1995).

As a result, Puerto Rico gets theorised through a perpetual 'status lens'. The current political status of Puerto Rico, and the debate around changing it, end up framing discussion on Puerto Rico from a variety of perspectives. Many scholars of Puerto Rico – particularly those not from the island - have remarked upon the tendency of Puerto Ricans to conflate every possible issue with the

status issue. As Anderson (1973: 17) puts it, "it is the status-identity of Puerto Rico with regard to the United States which provides the ultimate framework for the posing of all other problems. The so-called 'status problem' provides the moral context within which all meaningful issues in Puerto Rico are expressed". Fernández (2000: 269) reflexively notes that "the social situation and political status are part of our *Weltanschauung* and are so intertwined as to give the appearance of one-ness". The 'meaningful issues' that get interpreted in a status framework include debates on politics, economics, culture, society, law, history, and psychology.³ Carr (1984: 3), for example, notes that "economic problems are never seen, as perhaps they should be, as independent of status choices", and Espada (1999: 143) describes Puerto Rican society as a "daily reality of colonised minds and colonised bodies".

Remarkably, the dominance of the status question in Puerto Rico has not been matched by academic research into it. Very little empirically rigorous work has been completed on the status question itself. What exists falls into three broad categories. First, there are a handful of quantitative studies based on statistical analyses of surveys and voting data from past elections and plebiscites. For example, Barreto (2000a) contends it is likely that Puerto Ricans vote in general elections according to their status preferences. Cámara-Fuertes and Rosas-Cintrón (2004) forge links between the status positions, political views and socio-economic backgrounds of Puerto Ricans, noting that statehood supporters tend to be urban, poor, uneducated and reliant on federal aid; independence supporters are younger, highly educated and middle class; and Commonwealth supporters are "disproportionately rural" (2004: 170).

The second body of empirical literature on status attempts to reveal the perspective of US Congress. As the arbiter of any status change and the locus of political power over Puerto Rico, this institution has received significant attention. For example, an interview and questionnaire-based study of members of Congress by Colón Morera et al (1993) notes the repeated

³ While a discussion of all these disciplinary areas is beyond the scope of this chapter, debates on politics are specifically examined in section 2.6, and issues of history and academic production dealt with as part of the thesis' methodology in the next chapter.

indifference shown to Puerto Rican affairs. The authors conclude that status is "too far removed from congressional election or re-election concerns in order for it to become a salient issue demanding significant attention" (1993: 364). Similarly, Trías Monge (1997: 3) contends that Congress "studiously ignores" Puerto Rico and is not clear about the status options it is actually willing to accept, nor in what forms. Further, Rivera Ortiz and Ramos (2001) observe how the terrain of the status debate in Congress has shifted from classical issues of disenfranchisement and democracy and towards economic questions. As such, Congress increasingly insists that any status solution be 'revenue neutral' - that is, require no further expenditure on the part of the United States.

The third body of empirical work on status is based on "formalist-legalist readings of the US-Puerto Rico relationship" (Laó, 1997: 172). These take data in the form of the countless legal precedents (Rivera Ramos, 2001) and US Congressional hearings (Lugo-Lugo, 2006) that have made up debates on status. This data is typically used to argue for one favoured status option (Rubinstein, 2001; Smith, 2007; Malavet, 2002) or for the imperative of formal decolonisation more generally (Duffy Burnett, 2007; Trías Monge, 1997). The bias towards legal studies in the literature on status - as indicated by their disproportionate number - perhaps reflects the dominant framing of status as a principally legal or juridical question. It is presumed that the most important contributions to the debate are made from this perspective, since the juridical parameters of the current framework of US-Puerto Rican relations appear to define what is possible (Malavet, 2004). Political analysts therefore note it may be no coincidence that Puerto Rican political elites so often have a legal education (Cámara-Fuertes, 2010: 5).

2.4.1 *Challenges to hegemonic discourses in Puerto Rico*

The existing empirical scholarship on the status question does nothing to challenge the framework that it sets, nor the power relations that its hegemony maintains. However, the present research enters at a moment when

progressive scholars have started to problematise discourses of colonialism and nationalism in Puerto Rico. Given that these discourses form the foundation of status, some authors have applied their critiques to challenge status by extrapolation. While these are not studies of status directly, they inspire the present study nonetheless by problematising its foundational concepts. Fortunately, some writers have directly challenged the current framework of status by using new theories of power, but this work requires empirical grounding.

First, progressive scholars have started to rethink the nature of colonialism in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico's colonial experience does not fit a classical account of direct military and political control, metropolitan neglect, and violent nationalist reaction, as in many neighbouring Caribbean and Latin American republics (Laó-Montes, 2008: 15). Regardless, most island intellectuals frame Puerto Rican struggles in this way, "within a nineteenth-century model of colonialism in which the colonised live in daily confrontation with the invader on their own soil" (Grosfoguel et al, 1997: 10). It is now accepted that Puerto Ricans have democratically consented to colonialism by supporting the status quo in plebiscites (Cabranes, 1986: 462). Today Puerto Ricans experience colonialism in their everyday lives not in the form of state-centred metropolitan domination, but rather, through consumer practices (Flores, 2000). This condition has been named the 'lite colonial': "as colonial subordination becomes transnationalised it also tends to shift from a primarily political, state-, and institution-driven force to a commercial one impelled by markets and oriented toward consumers" (2000: 38).

Recent theories of colonialism in Puerto Rico are based upon alternative understandings of power. Colonial power is no longer understood to operate along a state-centric axis between the metropolitan state and the peripheral colonial state, as assumed by political nationalists. Rather, colonial power is enacted along multiple axes that transcend the hierarchy of state power, such as class, gender, race, and transnational economic flows. Grosfoguel et al (1997) therefore argue that Puerto Ricans experience a 'double coloniality of power' -

both a state-centric coloniality vis-a-vis the United States and a classist and racist "internal colonialism" hegemonically enacted by local elites, "sometimes under the banner of a nationalist ideology" (1997: 23). The experience of Latin America demonstrates that formal state decolonisation via political independence does nothing to dismantle "the old colonial racial and class hierarchies" (1997: 23). These ideas inspire the thesis by highlighting that the status question is not the only way to understand colonialism in Puerto Rico. Colonialism is manifested in the form of power relations that are not limited to, nor set by, the current political relationship between the metropolitan state and peripheral colonial state. This highlights the possibilities for non-state-centric resistances to colonialism.

Despite these fresh critiques, colonialism remains a dominant discourse in Puerto Rico. One sign of this is the hostility with which ideas of the 'postcolonial' have been received by Puerto Rican scholars. They have "singularly fallen on deaf ears" (Flores, 2000: 35). Duany (2002: 123) paradoxically calls Puerto Rico a 'postcolonial colony' in that its population has a strong sense of national identity but little desire to become a nation-state. However, the dominant connotation of postcolonialism as a temporal condition coming 'after-colonialism' or 'after-independence' means it is largely deemed incompatible with the still-colonial Puerto Rico. In its apparent proposal to leave colonial questions behind, most Puerto Rican scholars struggle to see postcolonial work as anything but a ratification of the colonial status quo. For example, Lugo-Lugo (2006) believes the dominance of discourses of global postcolonialism and a 'new world order' in US academic and political institutions has allowed the US to stall the status issue and keep Puerto Rico as a territory. "With the increasing pervasiveness of postcolonial theory in the US academy", she argues, "it has become quite difficult to discuss coloniality without prefixes" (2006: 127).

Puerto Rican nationalism has also been heavily critiqued by progressive scholars of the island. In particular, postmodern authors challenge the hegemony of political nationalism by attempting to expose the 'nation' as an

essentialist, exclusionary construct of an intellectual class with a political project to fulfil (Grosfoguel et al, 1997). They severely criticise the elite “guardians of the nation” - those who “cannot but insist on the image of a Puerto Rican culture on the verge of disintegration under the blows of imperialism” (Ayala and Bernabe, 2007: 326). For example, Gil (1994) argues that the nation is not an extant entity but a myth that has been created by *independentistas* to advance their own ideological agendas. As he puts it, “the 'national project' cannot be completed without national liberation (the founding of a national state)... Either this politics liberates the nation-subject, or it is alienated, refracted, imperialist, and Yankee”(1994: 98). In other words, *independentistas* are so invested in their national myth that they are unable to fathom any sort of justice without or beyond it. These works inspire the thesis by drawing attention to the elite interests served by status positions.

More widely, the cultural nationalist discourse promoted by all political parties has been critiqued as a conservative account of the nation that denies racial and sexual difference and excludes the Puerto Rican diaspora. Negrón-Muntaner (2007: 10) notes that marginalised sexual and racial groups in Puerto Rico are “unable to comply with the classical narratives of self and nation implied by all traditional status choices”. Duany (2002) considers Puerto Ricans a “nation on the move” in light of constant revolving-door migration between the island and the United States. The Puerto Rican diaspora therefore undermines traditional party political discourses of nation as a unity of territory, birthplace, citizenship, language, and culture. Disrupting the coherence of a national category that all parties assume in their discussions, the diaspora is mostly ignored in status debates and has always been excluded from participating in plebiscites.

A handful of progressive scholars have directly critiqued the hegemony of the status question. These writers attempt to untangle the status question from the many problems that have traditionally been subsumed beneath it. For example, Fernández (2000: 270) looks to contextualise the status question within a “New Major Social Project” aimed at “a profound improvement of

economic and social conditions" on the island. Within this, "the political status issue would be a part but no more than just that: a part which may not even be the most important one" (2000: 264). In a similar vein, Duchesne Winter (2007: 94) comments that "status change is not a sufficient condition for a profound social transformation, and it is not even clear that it might be a necessary condition". However, Fernández (2000: 263) laments that the "fresh and imaginative thinking" required to reframe Puerto Rican problems beyond status - "an object of unquestioned worship" - is "currently nowhere to be found in the political establishment".

Grosfoguel (1997) attempts to 'de-essentialise' the status question beyond colonialism and nationalism by framing it instead in terms of individual rights and quality of life. This involves leaving behind the idea that any of the options is able to genuinely end colonialism, accepting US hegemony over the region as inevitable, and favouring the option that deepens the existing metropolitan rights of Puerto Ricans: statehood. In this view, independence is a hopeless position founded upon essentialist principles of national dignity and self-determination, which can do nothing to "significantly improve the standard of living and the democratic and civil rights that Puerto Ricans already enjoy" (1997: 70). Rather, Grosfoguel advocates a "radical democratic" form of statehood, in which a contingent of US Congressional representatives and senators from a Latin American nation could challenge the empire from within (Grosfoguel, 2008: 7). Another non-essentialist interpretation of the status debate is Duchesne Winter's '*independencia* light', which rejects a heavy, confrontational, state-centric nationalism in favour of a project that looks to seize advantage "within the social, economic and political balances of power, without attempting to seize it centrally" (Duchesne Winter, 1991: 6).

To summarise the section, this thesis enters at a moment where Puerto Rican scholars are beginning to critique the hegemony of the status question. Empirical work is required that can speak to these new debates on colonialism, nationalism and status. At the same time, however, Puerto Rico's academic old guard has sought to reinforce the hegemony of status with new publications

under the old terms of political nationalism (for example, Berríos Martínez, 2010). Evidently, the dichotomy of colonialism and nationalism continues to influence the majority of academic production on the status question. Indeed, Pantojas-García's (2005: 164) quip that "the end of the Puerto Rican status question would also mean the end of many academic careers" serves to highlight the largely uncontested dominance of status in the island's academic institutions.

2.5 (Challenging) scale: where politics happens

2.5.1 *Discourses of politics, state and scale*

This section reviews traditional and progressive approaches to the interactions between politics and space. Specifically, the 'political' is encased in assumptions about the state and about scale. It is important to outline different approaches to the interactions between politics, state and scale in order to understand how the hegemony of the status question has skewed assumptions about these interactions in Puerto Rico. Notably, the dominance of status has influenced scholars of island politics to prioritise the units of nation, state and nation-state.

Traditional discourses of politics conceive of the state and its institutions as the locus of political power. They see it as a legitimate site of authority that is neutral and responsive to the needs of a plurality of groups (Sharp et al, 2000: 3). State power is centralised, rooted in particular institutions, and exercised by the elites that control them. Flint (2003: 618) refers to this as "Politics with a large 'P': "the institutional arrangements regarding the control of the state and its foreign relations, with a genealogy of statesmanship and high politics". It is based on what Allen (2004: 7) refers to as a "centred view of power": "[t]he state as the central actor guarantees social order through the distribution of its powers to select elites and bureaucratic authorities and thus effectively 'contains' society within its territorial boundaries". Power is understood to operate vertically in a hierarchy that assumes the salience of scale. The central

state is deemed the most powerful entity in a “descending order of spatial scales, where those further up the scalar ladder are more powerful than those further down” (2004: 9).

In the postwar period, social scientists assumed that states were aligned as nation-states. The nation-state is based on the Westphalian principle of territorial sovereignty. This designates the power that a nation has over its territory – in other words, “to make final decisions and impose the law on a territorially bounded national community” (Pabón, 2007: 66). In this view, national economies and societies are fixed categories over which the state holds central authority. The nation-state therefore corresponds to an understanding of politics as government: “the administrative capacities and aspirations of the state in its national, regional, and local manifestations” (Legg, 2011: 347). As such, traditional political discourse sees the nation-state as the “container of politics” (Sparke, 2009: 489). The tendency to presume the nation-state as the natural unit of political and social organisation is called ‘methodological nationalism’ (Larner, 2011: 341).

Given that the state is traditionally deemed the locus of political power, and the sovereign nation-state the naturalised unit for social and political organisation, political debate in non-independent societies tends to be framed by the concepts that correspond to the realisation of the nation-state: namely, decolonisation and self-determination (Rivera Ortiz and Ramos, 2001; Sutton, 2008). Decolonisation is broadly understood as the achievement of self-determination, either through political independence and the formation of a nation-state, full integration with an existing nation-state (the colonial metropolis), or an autonomous arrangement of shared powers with the metropolitan nation-state. Self-determination is the perceived right of a people, who typically identify as a nation and with a particular territory, to determine their own political future (Flint, 2009: 676). This is premised on an assumption that its territory is controlled unjustly by an external state power, from whom powers should be reclaimed. Self-determination, as exercised through

plebiscites and referenda, is one means of realising decolonisation; other means include resistance and revolution (Laó-Montes, 2008: 15).

However, the nation-state is no longer seen as a self-evident and fixed container of political power. Rather, it is now commonplace to consider that its power to “monopolise loyalties” (Pabón, 2007: 67) is being eroded by globalisation, through which state power is lost to transnational and supranational organisations. The nation-state is being undermined as “the primary focus of economic, political and cultural identification for its citizens” (Anderson and O’Dowd 1999: 598), and as such, is “in a serious crisis” (Appadurai, 2003: 337). The erosion of nation-state sovereignty corresponds to more recent understandings of politics as ‘governance’ as opposed to government. Governance “captures an apparent shift away from state-centric, top-down, monolithic forms of political power” (Larner, 2011: 337) in order to consider the increasing importance of supranational and subnational political authorities in governing processes.

Geographers have attempted to rethink the concept of scale, with implications for the spatiality of politics. For example, Amin (2002: 386) notes that scales are brought into being (and resisted) through discursive practices: “spatial scales – from home and locality to city, region, nation and continent – have no pre-given or fixed ontological status, but are socially produced”. Realising that scales are not given entities but rather constructed and performed opens up possibilities for alternative spaces of political agency beyond the hierarchy of descending state powers. In this regard, the thesis is inspired by Allen’s (2004) relational account of power outlined in section 2.2.3.

2.5.2 Dominant discourses of politics, state and scale in Puerto Rico

The present section notes that the traditional, centred views of power outlined above are clearly manifested in the dominant discourses of politics, state and scale in Puerto Rico. This is largely to do with the overwhelming focus of Puerto Rican politics on the status question.

The dominance of status has inevitably led scholars to frame Puerto Rican politics at the national scale. This is because status is ostensibly about decolonisation, and the traditional means of realising decolonisation is self-determination – a concept that takes the nation as its ontological unit. As legal scholar Rubinstein (2001: 423) notes, “nothing in life is as certain as the annual introduction in the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation of a resolution urging self-determination and independence for Puerto Rico”. Given that the principle of self-determination is rooted in modern international law and binding on the United Nations, and that Puerto Rico's status debate ultimately revolves around this principle, it is perhaps unsurprising that scholarship from the discipline of law has come to occupy a powerful position in the writing on Puerto Rican politics. As Álvarez-Curbelo (2007: 101) puts it, “many island commentators tend to frame Puerto Rican politics in terms of the metanarrative of decolonisation, which is in turn located within “serious” legal discourse.” The substantial body of legal studies on the status question⁴ therefore reinforces an understanding that the national is the most important scale for Puerto Rican politics.

The focus of Puerto Rican politics on decolonisation also corresponds to a focus on the state. This is because the status question conceives of decolonisation as a state-centric process, to be realised through a reconfiguration of relations between the metropolitan state and insular colonial state (Trías Monge, 1997). However, contemporary realities of economic globalisation and regional trade agreements have led to a rethinking of decolonisation and sovereignty beyond the traditional nation-state to consider other possible state formations based on more flexible notions of power. For example, Rivera Ortiz (2001: 175) notes there is now a gradation of possible relations between small island economies, their former metropolises and the rest of the world, including ‘sovereign free association’, ‘interdependent interdependence’ and even ‘autonomous integration’ - all with the potential to

⁴ See section 2.4 above.

expand the definition of Puerto Rican decolonisation beyond three mutually exclusive formulas.

The nation- and state-centric bias of Puerto Rican political scholarship is made evident by the serious lack of work about the local scale. Notably, only a handful of studies examine politics in the municipalities. Portillo and Rabell (1995) and López Pumarejo (1998) provide largely descriptive accounts of municipal reform and decentralisation. Heine (1993) analyses the leadership and governing style of the long-standing mayor of Mayagüez, a city in western Puerto Rico. Rabell et al (2007) document an innovative model of 'democratic governance' in the municipality of Caguas based on participatory democracy. However, the dominance of status and associated discourses has caused local politics to be mostly ignored and subordinated to larger debates about nation and state building. The present thesis addresses this situation by considering the relationship between the large-P politics of status and the smaller, more routine practices of politics on the ground in municipal settings.

2.5.3 Challenges to dominant discourses of politics, state and scale in Puerto Rico

Challenges to dominant discourses of politics, state and scale in Puerto Rico dispute state-centric accounts of political power. They note that the Puerto Rican state is weak, the nation-state is in decline, local politics is an important and under-researched site for political agency, and that Puerto Rican decolonisation must be rethought beyond the state. These points directly inspire the present thesis.

Picó (2007) critiques the status issue by questioning the nature of the political apparatus it proposes to modify: the state. He argues that the state is an authoritarian yet inefficient structure that Puerto Ricans have historically distrusted and resisted through their everyday lives and practices. The frequency and scale of these resistances – for example, the island's huge informal economy, drug trade and routine evasion of bureaucracy - is a

testament to the weakness of Puerto Rican state power. Further, the receipt of federal benefits has not fostered in Puerto Ricans a concomitant loyalty to the apparatuses of the Puerto Rican or US state, as “many resist every effort to exact accountability for these benefits... Most people lack the necessary documents and licenses to validate the legality of their daily routines” (2007: 26). Puerto Ricans therefore experience the state as an 'absent' entity, removed from the “everyday life of the communities and individuals of most portions of the island” (2007: 21).

Regarding the status question, the weakness of the state leads Picó to the following conclusion:

One may truly question whether the reluctance to endorse decisively any political status option for Puerto Rico comes from indecision... or from people's lack of inclination to enhance the powers of the state with a well-defined resolution of status that may bring about a greater presence in people's daily lives. Most commentators wonder whether Puerto Ricans want independence, statehood, or an enhanced Commonwealth. Perhaps they should ask whether they want more government or less, more state powers, and more accountability to the state. (Picó, 2007: 26-27)

As a critique of the very foundations of the status debate, Picó inspires the thesis. He argues that the status question is ultimately about the strengthening (or at least modification) of the Puerto Rican state - an institution that Puerto Ricans constantly evade through their everyday lives and practices. Picó's state analysis is supported by Pabón's (2007: 68) provocation that the “status paradigm... ignores that national sovereignty is always the sovereignty of the state, that is, of the political and economic sectors that control the state, and it is not the sovereignty of the 'people'”. In this view status is a discursive device that attempts to secure the hegemony of island elites. However, he contends that “the 'people' invoked by these elites does not exist. It is an empty signifier that is used by anyone, for any purpose” (Pabón, 2007: 68).

A further line of critique in the literature related to status is that its scalar focus on the nation-state constitutes a crucial theoretical flaw. Pointing

out that the nation-state is the ontological political unit that all status options assume and aspire to realise, Pabón (2007: 65) argues that the three main parties are therefore structurally identical: “despite their apparent differences”, their political discourse “has as a central trope national sovereignty, be it as a claim for an independent or autonomous national state or as a demand to complete the island’s annexation to the United States”. He then contends that the nation-state focus of status means it is powerless to solve mundane local and global issues that do not occur on, nor are limited to, this scale. That the formally independent countries in the region continue to face similar issues to the non-independent Puerto Rico should make clear that the nation-state is an unappealing model for Puerto Rico's own development. Pabón (2007: 65) therefore considers status a “debate that is much ado about nothing, a nonsense dilemma based on an obsolete political paradigm that stifles political imagination and blocks alternative political imaginaries” (2007: 65).

This thesis attempts to respond empirically to three theoretical insights from Picó (2007) and Pabón (2007) above. First, it clearly demonstrates that status is a debate about state power. Second, it looks to expose the interests of the elites who aspire to control that state. Third, it enables a discussion of ontological challenges to the status question itself, given its framing around a unit of social and political organisation in crisis.

Puerto Rican postmodern scholars have set about rethinking the possibilities for political intervention beyond the units of nation, state and nation-state prioritised by the status question. This has involved a spatial turn away from the grand narratives of nationalism, colonialism and revolution, and towards smaller, more concrete scales such as community and local struggle. Gil’s (1994) theoretical work is pioneering in this regard. He points out that *independentista* discourse assumes that “no regional productive practice is possible short of Liberation” (1994: 99). Its focus on the national has created a “discursive plug” that is “incompatible with the development of microfoundational and discrete strategies at a regional level (which must have specific, realizable, reachable ends, and offer a greater degree of equity and

happiness in microcosmic settings)" (1994: 100). In agreement with other progressive scholars, he understands that Puerto Rican politics should pay greater attention to quality of life issues. He therefore proposes a decentralisation of power from the central state to local administration: "imagine, then, an administrative conception of power in terms of certain "places" that have to be covered, because the place of True Power, the national state, has been vacated" (1994: 100).

Having deconstructed the nation as revolutionary collective, he goes on to challenge nationalists' account of the Puerto Rican self. Gil (1994) still defines the Puerto Rican as a political subject, but not an *independentista* or 'national subject' struggling for an imagined national liberation. Rather, [s]he is an "individual" whose "capacity for response [is]... limited to a reduced number of enunciations that denote recognizable interests in their more or less immediate perimeter" (1994: 102). "In other words", he explains, "mayors who are occupied with the sanitary condition of the community might gain more votes than those that promise Liberty and National Sovereignty. Terms like independence, truth, sovereignty, statehood... have very probably lost their signifying capacity for our context of messages" (1994: 102). Gil (1994) therefore makes a pioneering call for academics to abandon their obsession with status, a debate that is defined by empty signifiers that do not connect to the material politics of everyday issues. Academics must take local politics much more seriously:

I believe that, more than the Struggle for Independence, we intellectuals are confronted by micro-organizational work. This work's "agenda" lies in sectoral organisation and delimited action within well-defined and contained parameters [...] Our work more properly rests on a more difficult encounter with the small problems, the daily, micro-foundational conflicts of life. (1994: 102)

Similarly, Negrón-Muntaner (2007: 15) theorises a 'politics of small problems' beyond the scales of nation, state and nation-state. Her approach recognises the political agency of Puerto Ricans to organise themselves beyond

dominant discourses in the pursuit of concrete political goals and improvements to daily life. This is about producing "more enabling narratives of self and community by seeing through the core assumption that political identities are based on national specificity or legal precedent" (2007: 13). She explains how the nonpartisan movement to close the US Navy's bombing range on the island municipality of Vieques in 2003 was successful because activists were able to articulate a "politics of small problems" (2007: 14) framed around local demands rather than nationalism or anticolonialism. "By invoking smallness", she explains, "I am ultimately parodying the still-dominant idea that only when the 'big' problems of nation-building, state founding, and/or capitalist 'development' are solved, will 'the people' be liberated... A politics of small problems is the opposite of a traumatised politics based on national identity" (2007: 15).

This thesis is inspired to speak to the theories of Gil (1994) and Negrón-Muntaner (2007), both of whom identify the potential of political practices at the local scale to disrupt and subvert the hegemonic discourses of the status question. Given the dearth of research into Puerto Rican politics in the municipalities, it seems appropriate to consider the way in which the negotiation of 'small problems' at this scale could challenge the theoretical and practical salience of the status question. The thesis therefore responds to Negrón-Muntaner's (2007: 15) call for Puerto Ricans and scholars of the island to see politics anew with "fresh eyes".

Moreover, the thesis is inspired by progressive island scholars who are rethinking the very meaning of decolonisation. Decolonisation has been theorised without privileging the state as the locus of political power and scalar framework for realising it. As Grosfoguel (2008: 6) argues, state-centric decolonisation merely validates the aspirations of existing colonial elites to dominate the new state apparatus: "to become a "national bourgeoisie, to be presidents and senators of the Republic or ambassadors or consuls in foreign countries". Laó-Montes (2008: 15) concurs, remarking that decolonisation "goes beyond the often discussed issue of the status of Puerto Rico... [it] is more

than merely kicking out an imperial power from the administration of a colonial state, much more than achieving 'independence' in the sense of building a 'sovereign' nation-state" (2008: 15).

New approaches to decolonisation are based on alternative theories of power beyond the state. As Flores (2000: 38) puts it, "the move for decolonisation needs... to be flexible, dynamic, and democratic in the sense of scepticism toward the postulation of a singular vanguard force or an obligatory teleology of state power" (2000: 38). In this vein Laó-Montes (2008: 15) proposes a "new politics of decolonisation" in which power is fluid and able to "link local, national and global processes" (2008: 15). Many scholars concur that the localised power struggles of the citizen-led 'Peace for Vieques' movement to evict the US Navy represents an example of decolonisation beyond the status question (McCaffrey, 2002; Laó-Montes, 2008). While the conflict was "fundamentally rooted in Puerto Rico's status as a US colony" (McCaffrey, 2002: 9), the people "found a way to express their rejection of colonialism without having to choose between the options for political status" (García Passalacqua, in McCaffrey, 2002: 174).

To summarise the section, this research arrives at a moment when scholars are rethinking Puerto Rican politics in terms that challenge the established ontological focus on the scalar units of nation, state and nation-state. The hegemony of status has successfully cemented these units as the most important locations for politics. Progressive scholars now consider the significance of power beyond the central state to take seriously alternative locations of the political. In particular, the local scale has the potential to challenge the hegemony of the status question, and could give rise to alternative understandings of decolonisation based on local power struggles. The present thesis seeks to provide much-needed empirical grounding to these theoretical developments in the discussion on status.

2.6 What constitutes politics?

2.6.1 *Dominant and alternative discourses*

Traditional discourses on politics in social science correspond to traditional assumptions about political power, as discussed in section 2.5.1 above. Namely, politics is understood as government: the processes that maintain the apparatus of state power through durable political institutions. Politics is therefore traditionally conceptualised by identifying key institutions and analysing what they do. As such, politics is assumed to be about political parties and party systems (Graham, 1993); legislating and decision-making (Jones, 1994); elections, voting and representation (Farrell, 2001); executive administration (Goodnow, 2003); and justice (Griffith, 1997). These areas are typically analysed within frameworks of systems and models.

Just as alternative conceptions of power have challenged traditional understandings of political scale, so they also challenge traditional understandings of politics. For example, politics has been rethought to take seriously resistance to the state in the form of non-elite activism. Ordinary citizens are able to exercise political power to contest state structures and policies. In this vein Beck (1994; in Flint and Taylor, 2007: 296) notes that the “political vacuity” of state institutions is causing a growth of politics in non-institutional settings. Citizen groups and grassroots organisations constitute a ‘sub-politics’ or ‘small-p politics’ that is not tied to classes or parties and mobilises issues related to the environment, gender, sexuality and identity (2007: 296). Moreover, as outlined in section 2.2.2, politics is no longer understood as a merely static phenomenon but rather a performed act through which hegemonic discourses are circulated, appropriated and resisted. In this vein the thesis draws upon theories of everyday political practice.

2.6.2 Dominant discourses of politics in Puerto Rico

The status question dominates Puerto Rican politics. As González-Díaz (in Pabón, 2007: 69) puts it, “the political has been almost exclusively identified around the status question”. Similarly, Meléndez (1991: 127) notes that in Puerto Rico “politics has always been ‘status politics’.” The reason for this, he notes, is simple: “Puerto Rico has always been a colony, first under Spain, and after 1898 under the United States... As a result, the parties’ programs and politics have evolved around the issue of the island’s political status” (1991: 127). The status question therefore becomes the prism through which all politics is filtered. Thus, “even though a specific political event may not be directly related to the status problem, it is probable that both leaders and masses (especially the latter) will interpret it through their preconceived status prejudices and preferences” (Cámara-Fuertes, 2004: 84).

Puerto Rico’s three main political parties define themselves principally in terms of their status positions. As such they are not organised along a traditional left-right or liberal-conservative ideological spectrum. Rather, they adhere to a centre-periphery model of political organisation, from integration (statehood) through autonomy (Commonwealth) to separation (independence) (Anderson, 1988: 13). Each party contains both liberal and conservative legislators who span the ideological spectrum, but all are united under a status preference (Cámara-Fuertes, 2009: 114). As such, Cámara-Fuertes (2010: 152) contends that “there is not an overarching ideological structure in the legislators beyond status”. He reaches this conclusion by statistically analysing the views of central legislators on a wide range of economic, social and political issues, and showing that the average positions of each party “are basically the same” (2010: 213). This, he argues, has far-reaching and negative consequences for decision-making. Lacking in clear ideological principles, Puerto Rican parties go about addressing serious problems such as crime, drugs or education in an incoherent, ad hoc, improvised way (2010: 128).

Politics in Puerto Rico is also monopolised by the political parties. They have come to dominate most structural functions and institutions of the political system. In Puerto Rico the line between parties and government is blurred such that the two have become conflated, causing “party-government confusion” (Rivera Ortiz et al, 1991: 187). Puerto Rico therefore has a developed system of political patronage in government jobs. As Cámara-Fuertes (2004: 58) puts it, “the ‘correct’ party in power can mean promotions, raises, and work for other members of the family, and the ‘wrong’ party in power can spell demotions, harassment, or outright job loss”. Negrón Portillo’s (1993) study of government workers indicates that “political advantage” has replaced the values of professionalism and efficiency as the criteria for advancement in public service. “Governmental gigantism” in the form of large, inefficient central agencies (González Taboada, 2006: 89), and the “centralist mentality” of the parties (Hernández Colón, 2006c: 25), are also deemed to impede democracy. Given that the parties are increasingly seen to take decisions to serve their own interests before those of citizens, it is now understood that Puerto Rico faces a “crisis of governance” (Ortiz-García and Pérez-Lugo, 2009: 141).

The parties are the key intermediaries between citizens and the mainland federal government (Anderson, 1988). As such they are responsible for the management and distribution of all federal resources to institutions and individuals on the island. This makes the political parties very powerful in a domestic context, and at the same time, administrators of the present colonial regime (Anderson, 1988). Ironically, therefore, the parties actively reproduce a system they publicly claim to want to change. Rivera Ortiz et al (1991: 178) note that the Puerto Rican political system is composed of a durable framework of semi-autonomous central and federal institutions. Thus, despite the parties’ organisation around the unsettled question of political status, the system itself is able to operate in a more or less settled way. Status would therefore appear to be a relatively arbitrary and partisan superimposition onto this framework. As Anderson (1988: 4) puts it, “the party system functions to legitimise the

arrangement of dependency, while at the same time permitting the expression of degrees of satisfaction with that arrangement”.

Dominant understandings of politics in Puerto Rico have paid extremely little attention to decision-making. In Soto-Crespo's (2006: 734) view, this reflects the implicit belief of most Puerto Rican scholars that Puerto Rico's state “is a colonial administrative formation that lacks agency and... is but a puppet of US imperialism”. Only two discussions of decision-making are to be found in the literature. The first is Cámara-Fuertes' (2009: 121) observation on the crucial role of party discipline and the caucus rule in the central legislature. Legislators must obey a fixed blanket voting position or face “some kind of punishment, such as office budget reduction or removal from committees” (2009: 122). The second is Anderson's (1973: 3) reflection that Puerto Rican politicians are “obliged to concentrate their energies on concrete issues” rather than the status question in order to secure re-election. Therefore, despite politicians' stated desires to change the island's status, the “exigencies of electoral party politics in Puerto Rico reinforces the functional acceptance of the autonomist status quo” (1973: 8).

The only other mentions of decision-making in the literature consist of Gándara-Sánchez's (2013: 2) observation on the lack of a tradition of bipartisan cooperation between parties, and Negrón-Muntaner's (2007: 4) suggestion that politics is not seen as a serious deliberative process because “actual decision-making processes are not accessible to the vast majority of Puerto Ricans”. There is therefore a large gap for research on formal political decision-making in Puerto Rico. Meléndez (1998: 54) notes that a study comparing “programmatic politics (what the parties offer) and public politics (what they do)” is particularly necessary. The present thesis fills this gap by comparing what is said about status (in party political discourse) and what is done about it (in everyday political practice).

Finally, Puerto Rican politics is commonly understood to refer to elections and voting. The island's very high rate of electoral participation (typically around 75%) has received attention (Cámara-Fuertes, 2004). The

literature also reflects that the parties have convinced citizens that voting is the only viable form of political intervention, severely limiting their “political repertoire” (Rivera Ortiz et al, 1991: 214). The construction of citizens as passive electors reinforces the hegemonic understanding that Puerto Rican politics is principally about the political parties, and by extension, status. Further, the hegemony of the parties and status combine during general elections to give the impression that every four years “the whole political future of the island... is being decided” (Cámara-Fuertes, 2004: 65). The status question cements understandings of politics as voting most obviously through plebiscites. Puerto Rico’s plebiscites in 1967, 1993 and 1998 have received significant attention, especially from the perspective of statistical analysis (for example, Bayron Toro, 2008; Barreto, 2000a).

2.6.3 Challenges to dominant discourses of politics in Puerto Rico

The scholars who critique the state-centric geographies of Puerto Rican politics and status also attack the hegemony of status over understandings of politics. Notably, Pabón (2007:69) contends that “its discursive operation has tended to render invisible any other definition of what one could understand by politics”. He explains:

It is practically impossible to refer to any issue that could be considered political outside the framing of the status question. If it does not have to do with status – independence, autonomy or statehood – it is not political... If the issues are not linked to status, they are not political until they are tied to this discourse... Status is like a black hole that swallows every political space in Puerto Rico. (2007: 69)

Further, he provokes that the parties are not only structurally identical - organising themselves around the principle of national sovereignty - but also structurally *dependent* upon the status question. As such, “those who declare that their fundamental political goal is to resolve the island's status are the ones who most dread its resolution, because without the issue of the status they

would cease to have the issue that justifies their political existence” (2007: 71). Similarly, Flores and López (1994) observe that the parties are, to a degree, dependent upon one another’s discourse to cement their own positions: Commonwealth supporters rely on *independentistas* for their anti-assimilationist, anti-statehood stance, but statehood supporters also draw upon the *independentistas*’ “rejection of the whole Commonwealth setup as an outlived ‘colonial’ arrangement” (1994: 93). The present research contributes to these ground-breaking theoretical lines of thinking by looking to provide them with empirical support. It critiques the status question as a hegemonic discourse that is constructed and maintained by elites who look to control the domestic political system well before considering any changes to it.

The dominance of status is also highlighted by traditional scholars as a way of arguing for its urgent formal resolution. Accepting that the parties “do not align themselves along a spectrum having anything to do with ordinary issues of public concern, such as health, education, jobs, crime or the environment”, Duffy Burnett (2007: 79) laments that “high-stakes issues that should be settled as a precondition to the effective conduct of daily political life have come to dominate – and distort – public discourse”. In this view the distorting effect of status further justifies closing the question according to a traditional and permanent formula, allowing for the overdue reorganisation of domestic politics according to other ideas. Burnett (2007) understands that the question’s lack of resolution, perpetuated by progressive scholars who look to disrupt it, prevents Puerto Rican politics from moving on to a better framework for decision-making. “The failure to resolve basic matters of political organisation, relegating them instead to perpetual limbo, may make good material for scholarly conversation”, she concludes, “but it is a terrible way to conduct political life” (2007: 81).

Progressive scholars have theorised Puerto Rican politics as a performance, with a particular focus on the status question. Villamil (1984: 3) calls the status debate an “interminable soap opera, with different actors coming on the scene and saying pretty much the same things over and over”.

Ríos Ávila (2008: 248) notes that "the political parties in the island have co-opted (sometimes demagogically so) the juridical issue and turned it into a theatre of national identity". Duchesne Winter (2008: 13) argues that the constant political performance of the status question has cemented it as the "salient defining aspect" of Puerto Rican national identity:

[A]s such it has become a self-perpetuating political conundrum. Ironically, Puerto Ricans would lose an essential source of their national passion if the status issue were to be resolved. They would depart from a collective debate that has emotionally bound this Caribbean imagined community, by being uttered, staged, reproduced, allegorized, or encrypted 24 hours a day in the airwaves, the literature, the press, cyberspace, or daily conversation spanning the island for most of its modern history. (2008: 13)

In another publication, Duchesne Winter (2007) derides the superficiality of each party's status performances. The *independentistas*, he notes, "live up to their anti-imperialist self-image by incessantly pointing to trivial differences between the Puerto Rican state and the imperialist regime of the United States" (2007: 93). This rhetoric ignores the way in which neoliberal globalisation has undermined the powers of the sovereign nation-state to protect communities and individuals in order to enable "spectacular visions regarding the liberation and rebirth of the Puerto Rican nation" (2007: 93). He attacks the "dismally ingenuous" pro-statehood discourse in terms of its "apocalyptic warnings" against separation from the United States (2007: 93). Finally, he attacks the pro-Commonwealth discourse as a shallow identity politics "playing on banal nationalism" and stripping "anticolonialism to a bare anti-statehood stance with hardly any social content" (2007: 92). Given that these scathing observations are not grounded in empirical research, this thesis fills the available gap for a rigorous comparative study of party political status discourses.

Scholars of Puerto Rico now consider politics as a process in which dominant discourses may be contested through non-state activism. For example, Grosfoguel et al (1997) contend that Puerto Ricans have adopted a strategy of *jaibería*, or mimicry, involving the imitation of American discourses

and styles in order to resist the most oppressive elements of colonial rule. Mobilising their US citizenship to claim constitutional rights, Puerto Ricans resist “master narratives of independence and nationalism” by struggling for a “quality of life in the present rather than in a distant future ‘paradise’” (1997: 71). However, Rivera Ortiz (2007) notes that civic forms of political mobilisation have never extended to the status issue, which is monopolised by the political parties. There has never been a large-scale demonstration about status issues without their direct involvement and supervision (2007: 10). This usefully confirms that the main institutions performing and circulating status discourses in Puerto Rico are the political parties.

Theories of everyday practice have been applied to Puerto Rico in order to question the relevance of status and related discourses as ways of framing Puerto Rican experiences. They disrupt the traditional assumption that colonialism is a “prime mover determining and shaping all social life” (Lao, 1997: 172). Ortiz-Negrón (2007), for example, explores the political effects of Puerto Rican consumer culture. For her, “the centrality of shopping in public discourse and as an everyday practice can serve as a heuristic device to question the limitations of certain structures, social categories, and discourses that attempt to explain contemporary Puerto Rican society” (2007: 40). Invoking the dead-end of the status issue and consumer culture even as a kind of escapism from this, she says the latter “offers the subject the gratification of the present in an indeterminate world that no longer believes in utopias” (2007: 43). Negrón-Muntaner (2007: 6) agrees, arguing that status will only become a crucial question once it is seen less in terms of jurisprudence or national sovereignty and more as “a mechanism to ward off a dangerous threat to a way of life”. Similarly, the thesis is interested to see if everyday Puerto Rican politics takes place in ways that cannot be fully captured by hegemonic ways of thinking on the island.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework adopted in the thesis. Specifically, it is interested in how the hegemony of the status question is reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through elite performances of power in the everyday politics of three municipalities. This interrogation has been situated within recent works in Caribbean studies and Caribbean geographies, broader literatures in geography and social science, and existing scholarship in Puerto Rico from a variety of perspectives. It was noted that the status question is hegemonic in Puerto Rico. Moreover, the dominance of status has not, remarkably, been matched by empirical research into it. Most empirically rigorous work on status tends to validate the question and its ontological framework of scales.

Fortunately, the framework of the status question has recently been challenged by new theories based on alternative conceptions of political power beyond the central state. While there is at present very little empirical work that speaks to these theories, the thesis looks to address this. New literature questions the dominance of status, its spatialities of nation, state and nation-state, and the motives of the political elites that control its discourse. These critiques also highlight new spaces for studying Puerto Rican politics – namely, the local and the everyday. It therefore seems apt to respond to these calls with a study that considers the relationship between the structural dominance of the status question and everyday politics in Puerto Rico. In this way, the thesis demonstrates the importance of a nuanced understanding of hegemony, and speaks to recent debates on politics, power and decolonisation in Puerto Rico.

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3 Examining Puerto Rican status from an outsider's perspective

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that a study about the relationship between the structural dominance of the Puerto Rican status question and everyday political practice would importantly fill a number of research gaps in the existing literature. This chapter explains how I arrived at a focus on this relationship, and how I selected the municipal scale of Puerto Rican politics as the most suitable context for investigating it. In particular, it narrates how a focus on status and everyday politics was developed through an ethnographic engagement with the field. With reference to postcolonial Caribbean writers, it explains that this engagement was made possible by my research positionality as an outsider to Puerto Rico. As a white British researcher I was positioned advantageously within a regional Caribbean mindset that facilitated my progress both practically and intellectually.

The first section establishes the epistemological challenges of doing social research in Puerto Rico. Namely, the Puerto Rican and North American perspectives that comprise most existing research reinforce the status question and related discourses as the definitive ways of organising the experiences and politics of the Puerto Rican people. The second section outlines my attempt to approach Puerto Rican politics from a different mindset that interrogates, rather than uncritically foregrounds, the dominance of status. Three elements define this mindset: my positionality as an outsider, extended fieldwork experience, and the possibilities of a geographical approach informed by postcolonialism. The third section outlines how I applied the mindset to a concrete research agenda, narrating the evolution of the project from an exploration of general geographical questions around status into a particular focus on its relationship to everyday politics in three municipalities.

The fourth section reflects that the development of the research was likely assisted by my colonial subjectivity. The fifth section explains why I came to the conclusion that municipal politics were best suited to my interests, and

outlines the logic that informed the selection of three particular municipal case study sites. The sixth section justifies the ethnographic research strategy that informed the research and presentation of findings. The seventh and final section details the methods and analytical techniques deployed in the research.

3.2 The epistemological challenges of doing social research in Puerto Rico

Social researchers of Puerto Rico face the epistemological issue that existing research is so often framed, directly or indirectly, by Puerto Rico's status and the debate around it. As Jackson (1987: 320) puts it, "every aspect of political and academic discourse about Puerto Rico bears the imprint of this fundamentally unequal relationship". This situation is manifested in much twentieth century work on Puerto Rico, written from both North American and Puerto Rican perspectives. The former perspective reflected and justified the interests of the United States to maintain Puerto Rico in a colonial relationship (Nieves-Falcón, 1971: 9; Lewis, 1963: 250). For example, Mintz's (1966) contribution to an academic volume prepared for a US Congressional status commission recommended no revisions to the status quo based on the "extremely dependent" nature of Puerto Ricans (1966: 396). Further, social scientific studies such as Oscar Lewis' (1964) hugely influential *La Vida* constructed Puerto Rican migrant communities in the United States as the "Puerto Rican problem" – a group "with inherent moral deficiencies that lacked the necessary... work ethic to improve their social, political and economic condition" (López, 2007: 65).

The latter perspective – writings on Puerto Rico by Puerto Ricans – also demonstrate a form of colonial bias in their obsession with the hegemonic issues of colonialism, nationalism and the status question. The traditional, colonial framing of the status debate sees decolonisation within the limited framework of options and solutions that are supposed to be feasible and acceptable to the colonial power - the United States (Rivera Ortiz, 2001).

Ultimately, however, this framework has not only failed to disrupt the dead-end in which Puerto Rico currently finds itself, but has actively created and reinforced it. Another approach to Puerto Rican status is clearly required if the deadlock is to be disrupted - one that is neither limited to the prescriptive framework of traditional status alternatives nor confined to the vocabulary that is traditionally mobilised to understand the issue.

Specifically, this new approach is about questioning the Western binary constructions - colonialism/nationalism, domination/resistance, coloniser/colonised, and self/other – that dominate explanations of the island's current political status and form the boundaries of most discussion about the alternatives (Ríos Ávila, 2008: 247). Moreover, it is about challenging the methodological nationalism – “the naturalisation of the global regime of nation-states”(Wimmer and Schiller, 2003: 576) - that underpins these binaries. Methodological nationalism is the Western conceptual tendency to privilege the nation-state as the optimal political unit for the organisation of societies and the production of knowledge. As explained in the previous chapter, the nation-state is indeed the political unit that frames much discussion of Puerto Rico's status, in ignorance of more recent discussions about the crisis of the nation-state. A new methodological approach to status therefore requires that researchers critique, rather than foreground, the vocabulary of dichotomies and nation-states as the definitive ways of organising the experiences and politics of the Puerto Rican people.

My own position as a Western geographical researcher also has epistemological implications in Puerto Rico. As Bermán-Santana (1996) highlights, the discipline of geography was also implicated in the process of maintaining Puerto Rico in a colonial relationship. Geographers were involved in the discursive construction of what she calls the 'doctrine of nonviability': that Puerto Rico "was not viable as an independent state and had no alternative but political and economic dependence upon the United States because it was too small, geographically too strategic, too poor in natural resources, and too overpopulated" (1996: 459). More generally geography has been well critiqued

as a project with inseparable links to past colonial endeavours (Sidaway, 2000: 606). Therefore, as a Western geographical researcher of Puerto Rico, I must avoid creating an unequal power relationship with my field analogous to the unequal relationship of political power that has existed between Puerto Rico and the United States for over 100 years. In other words, I need to avoid the practice of academic neo-colonialism and "incorporate the voices of 'others' without colonising them in a manner that reinforces patterns of domination" (England, 1994: 81).

3.3 Approaching Puerto Rican politics from a different mindset

Reflecting on the epistemological challenges above, I argue in this section that it was productive to enter my field from a different mindset. This would permit alternatives to colonially biased perspectives on the Puerto Rican status issue and consider its significance relative to other political processes taking place at different scales. Three elements define this mindset: my research position as an outsider, extended fieldwork, and the unique possibilities of a geographical approach informed by postcolonialism.

Given my aim to understand Puerto Rican status in a different way, my position as an unfamiliar outsider - neither Puerto Rican nor from the United States – represented an intellectual advantage. Doing research in another culture, Robson and Willis (1997: 4) note, has the potential to "counter tendencies towards ethnocentric or universalist views". Such views characterise much of the existing scholarship on Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. On the one hand, US-authored social research has often been ethnocentric, colonially motivated, unsympathetic and underpinned by prejudice. On the other, as outlined in the previous chapter, a great deal of work on the Puerto Rican status issue by Puerto Rican scholars is characterised by universalist views and the unchallenged hegemony of discourses on colonialism and nationalism. Given that the vast majority of social research on Puerto Rico has been written from either a North American or Puerto Rican perspective, the

literature therefore tends to position authors within a coloniser/colonised dichotomy.

My status as a British researcher enables me, in part, to avoid this identity trap. While I am obviously unable to examine the Puerto Rican status issue in a way that is value-free, neutral or 'objective', I am, on an individual level, able to sidestep the polarisation that has often characterised the debate and even reduced it to caricature (Pérez, 2004). As I am not from the United States, I escape easy identification as an agent of, or apologist for, the institutions of US empire. Moreover, as I am not Puerto Rican (or more specifically, not a Puerto Rican intellectual or politician), I do not attempt to claim epistemological high ground as an optimally positioned insider with an in-depth understanding of the Puerto Rican "reality" or "truth" (for example, see Romero-Barceló, 1978: 70). Puerto Ricans who write about island politics – journalists and self-styled media analysts as well as politicians and intellectuals – are known to overstate their knowledge and insights in order to argue for the imperative of their favoured status option. The fundamental problem in this situation, however, is that these authors are products of the very political culture they write about – one in which the status question is hegemonic. As a result status gets privileged in accounts that are insufficiently empirical and too often rhetorical (Cámara-Fuertes, 2010: 5).

By comparison, I was able to approach status with an advantageous sense of detachment from it. Herod (1999: 325) notes that the "outsider" is "constantly questioning and taking things less for granted, often precisely because one does not understand certain things in the way that an "insider" does". In this sense, my outsider mindset influenced the development of my particular line of enquiry. My epistemological starting point was to not take the discursive dominance of the status question for granted. I did not believe uncritically in the imperative of its immediate resolution, favoured no one status option, and approached with caution the default elite view that status was the most important political issue on the island. This critical approach was important for enabling an analysis of hegemony. Outsiders have a track record

of providing fresh perspectives on Puerto Rican affairs. For example, the British scholar Raymond Carr was commissioned to write *Puerto Rico: A Colonial Experiment* (1984) "precisely because he was new to the subject" (Cabranes, 1986: 452). Indeed, his selection, Rossant (1984; in Carr, 1984: x) notes, was influenced by the "difficulty of finding a scholar, whether Puerto Rican or American, who had not already made up his mind about what the relationship ought to be".

In an attempt to counter the colonial mindset that has characterised the discipline of geography and its past engagements with Puerto Rico, I decided to undergo a period of extensive pilot fieldwork and cultural immersion. Pilot work helps to circumvent the common practice of academic neocolonialism where the Western 'expert' has fixed their research parameters in a top-down manner before even entering the field. Indeed, in *Orientalism* Said (1978) ruminated on "the methodological question" of project origins, highlighting the importance of field experience in the formulation of a topic:

A major thing I learned and tried to present was that there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them. (1978: 15-16)

As its starting point, a new project on Puerto Rican status should attempt to broadly understand the present situation in order to then identify and pose the pertinent questions (Said's "beginnings") that could ultimately help to end or overcome the island's political deadlock.

This thesis approaches the Puerto Rican status question from the perspective of postcolonial geography. Postcolonial geographies are sensitive to the ways in which colonialism has had different economic, political, social and cultural effects in different locations. They consider colonial spaces as unique sites where "place, politics and identity" interact (McEwan and Blunt, 2002:1). It is acknowledged, in the words of Ashcroft et al (1998:10), that "every colonial encounter or 'contact zone' is different, and [that] each 'postcolonial' occasion needs... to be precisely located and analysed for its specific interplay".

Postcolonial geographies thus pay close attention to the spatial and temporal context of colonial experience, and as such move beyond the 'global' postcolonial approaches that homogenise the impact of colonialism across the world (Dirlik, 1994).

The sensitivity of postcolonial geographies to context corresponds to a theoretical interest in the materiality and performativity of space. Materially, they pay attention to the "physical, spatial, architectural, urban and landscape realities" in which colonial discourses are developed and manifested (King, 2003: 389). Performatively, they consider the ways in which these discourses are reinforced, modified and resisted through the lived, everyday experiences and actions of people who inhabit these spaces. These approaches take a particular interest in cities as sites of "built forms and physical spaces [that]... help to produce and reproduce social relations, identities, memories and subjectivities" (King, 2003: 389). Thus, postcolonial geographies move beyond mere analyses of colonial discourse and representation - which critics of postcolonial theory attack as politically inconsequential - to connect these ideas with "material practices, actual spaces and real politics" (Yeoh, 2001: 457).

A postcolonial and geographical approach to the status question can respond to the calls of the literature for empirical research that investigates, and challenges, its hegemony. First, it considers the material representation of status discourses in concrete forms such as landscape - including the ways in which they are reinforced, modified or resisted. Second, it also considers how these discourses are reified, reappropriated or contested through performed practices in lived and everyday contexts. This latter aspect opens up a serious intellectual consideration of the power of politics in practice to disrupt, or even overcome, the dominance of the status question. In sum, the focus of geography on issues of space and place enables a study about the spatial context of the political discourses that comprise the status question. Through a local focus on the concrete political spaces in which status is manifested but also potentially modified and resisted, a question that is hegemonically constructed at the scales of nation, state and nation-state can then be seen to assume alternative

geographies. This focus would contribute to the presently small body of research on local Puerto Rican politics by forging a connection between the discursive registers of the status question, its material representation, and everyday practices embedded in Puerto Rican place.

Postcolonial geographies are interested in the potential of "local scale analysis" (Nash, 2002: 222) to reveal the larger workings of colonialism. The present study explores this very dynamic in the Puerto Rican context by investigating the relationship between everyday, local political practices and the discourses of the status question. Nash (2002: 228) states that postcolonial geographies "work through the tension between understanding colonialism as general and global, and particular and local, between the critical engagement with a grand narrative of colonialism, and the political implications of complex, untidy, differentiated and ambiguous local stories". These are the very tensions that may be fruitfully investigated in Puerto Rico - tensions between grand narratives of colonialism, nationalism and the status question, and the local stories of Puerto Rican politics in practice.

Finally, as a partial response to the broader historical relationship between geography and colonialism, my research answers recent calls within postcolonial geography for more 'cosmopolitan' approaches to scholarship. Robinson (2003: 280) suggests that researchers should select an unfamiliar overseas region for study in order to undergo "attentive learning and a serious self-questioning: a 'provincialising' of Western knowledge and a learning of the limitations of Western insights, not their recentralisation." She advocates the "longer-term commitments" (2003:280) of language learning, self-insertion into unfamiliar fields, and dialogue with regional scholars as tactics for rejecting "the hegemonic and dominating position" and "theoretical tactics of universalisation" often adopted in geography (2003: 285). In line with this approach, I have selected an unfamiliar field (I am not from Puerto Rico and had no prior ties to it), have opted to work in a language that is not my first (I am not a native speaker of Spanish) and, during a stay in the island's public university, have engaged with many Puerto Rican scholars in the formulation of

my topic. These practices, which I describe more fully in the next section, represent my attempt to displace the colonialist and universalist undercurrents within past scholarship on Puerto Rico and the discipline of geography.

3.4 Applying a new mindset to a concrete research agenda

This section narrates the evolution of the project from an open-ended exploration of the spatialities of the status question into a particular focus on the relationship between status and everyday political practice in Puerto Rico. It demonstrates how I applied the above mindset to my research. This process was guided by an ongoing ethnographic dialogue with my field, which at first was broadly understood as Puerto Rican political culture. Crucially, I arrived at my research questions while coming to understand this culture – in which the status question is dominant - over time. Simultaneously, my understanding of Puerto Rican politics was constantly being refreshed as I consulted the existing literature and looked for ways to respond to its calls. Below I tell the story of how my project arrived at its "beginnings" (Said, 1978: 16). Rather than an arbitrary researcher's imposition, these beginnings emerged from the field. I outline the way in which the project took shape over three separate field trips between 2009 and 2011, each with different objectives and outcomes. I also briefly discuss the impact of logistical issues in shaping the research agenda during fieldwork.

3.4.1 *The first trip*

My first trip to Puerto Rico took place over a two-month period between June and August 2009. The purpose of this trip was threefold: first, to start to get to know Puerto Rico and commence my immersion in Puerto Rican society (this was the first time I had set foot on the island); second, to begin to try out the research ideas that I had developed during my first year on the project; and third, to expedite my acquisition of Spanish, a language that I had only started to

learn that year. I addressed each of these aims by attending a four-week intensive 'Spanish and Puerto Rican Culture' language and cultural immersion course in the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), remaining in San Juan for a further month to continue with my objectives. Along with language training and excursions around the island, this course provided a temporary base in the university and put me in contact with academics - most notably Dr Humberto García Muñiz and Dr Carlos Guilbe - who became influential in helping me to refine my research plans.

The research departed from a very broad interest in the geographies of the status debate, as informed by first-year study. Working on the assumption that geographers had written nothing about the status question, I was interested to ask: what is status, and where is it? Following the recommendations of my confirmation panel one month earlier, I brought to Puerto Rico a working hypothesis for investigation: that the status debate was a discourse, produced and performed through a network of sites and events, including political institutions (such as the parties, US Congress and the United Nations), cultural institutions (museums), education policy, the media, and public rallies.

The trip had a number of outcomes. First, the course in UPR influenced my methodological decisions around language. Language acquisition made me think about the distortion, losses, and changes of meaning that would occur if I were to conduct an English-language interview with a native Spanish speaker with less-than-perfect English. Thus, in advance of my second trip, I intensified my language acquisition in order to prepare myself for conducting research interviews in Puerto Rico's primary language. Second, while a pilot interview with the incumbent Secretary of State from the pro-statehood party revealed to me first-hand the vehemence with which the political elites debate the status issue, my field observations and multiple conversations with ordinary people all pointed towards the absence of status from the everyday concerns of Puerto Ricans. Third, local academics corroborated this view, objecting to my working hypothesis by telling me I would find it very difficult to trace the status

discourse between a network of sites during a moment in Puerto Rican political life when there were no plebiscite events on the agenda. This was, as one professor put it, "politics as normal". Fourth, there was a general sense amongst academics that new work on status was not forthcoming because all existing lines of inquiry had been exhausted: Puerto Rico was stuck in the *tranque*, so there was little, if anything, left to study.

3.4.2 The second trip

My second trip took place over four months between January and May 2010. Importantly, this gave me a semester back in Edinburgh to reflect on what I had learned and to reformulate my research goals. The main objective of the second trip was to return to my open research question: where in Puerto Rico is the status question? My secondary objectives were to continue improving my Spanish and commence reviewing the local literature, as many relevant books were only available in Puerto Rico, and often in Spanish. I had reflected on the comments of UPR staff about the exhaustion of status. I wondered if the real issue was not that there was nothing left to study, but rather, that there was nothing left to study according to the dominant framework in which status has traditionally been understood. In other words, had an established paradigm in the Puerto Rican academy limited opportunities for new ways of looking at the issue? Sensing that I could be able to move beyond this, I continued my search for status. However, this led to the realisation that status was indeed notable by its absence in Puerto Rico.

Two of the most significant institutions in which I could locate the debate were not even on the island: US Congress and the UN Decolonisation Committee. Not a single museum touched upon it, and a pilot interview with the Director of History and Social Studies in the Department of Education - who sets the political syllabus in public schools - led me to conclude that its treatment was so trivial and brief as to merit no further exploration. No political rallies to do with status took place, nor were there any other big status events to act as a lightning

rod for the discourse in the public sphere. Minor press and radio chatter occurred around the ultimately doomed attempts of Pedro Pierluisi, the pro-statehood Resident Commissioner, to get a plebiscite bill (HR2499) through US Congress, but it quickly disappeared once he had failed. The only institutions in which I could locate status in Puerto Rico were those that depended upon it for their existence: the three main political parties. With this revelation the parties became the focus of my study.

I collected data, both primary and secondary, from the Central Committees of the three main parties - a process that was facilitated by rapid improvements in my Spanish fluency. In total, I conducted thirteen interviews with central political figures, including those from two new political parties that identified themselves as non-status movements. I considered these political elites the key producers of the status discourse. Adapting the work of Sarah Radcliffe (1996), this material allowed me to formulate an argument that the status debate, as traditionally framed, was about three competing 'national imaginaries' (1996: 24). I considered that underlying each status preference was a spatial logic - a distinctive imagination of the national space - based upon a particular understanding of the relationship between nation and state. I intended to argue that each party privileged a particular blend of national discourses and symbols to construct a version of the Puerto Rican nation that was compatible with their status choice - be it independence, Commonwealth, or statehood. At this juncture I believed I had identified a research gap that lent itself to the study of Puerto Rico's imagined geographies, as constructed and represented through the status question. However, during my literature reviewing towards the end of trip I learned of Nancy Morris' (1995) *Puerto Rico: Politics, Culture and Identity*, and had to confront the disappointing prospect that my intended research had effectively been completed some fifteen years earlier!

The second trip had two main outcomes, both of which were crucial turning points for the development of the eventual project. First, the discovery of Morris' (1995) work underlined the need to study it carefully on my return to

Edinburgh. This inspired the search for a more original focus.⁵ Second, the pilot interviews contributed to my growing sense of how unreflexive the political elites were about the status question. In particular, they had found my questions that weighed up their status positions against actual political practice (for example, how status issues actually affected the work they performed as legislators) difficult to answer. After six months of fieldwork, therefore, I was building a picture of Puerto Rico as a place where the one issue that dictates the domestic political structure is virtually invisible in practice. This revelation, reinforced by the theory of progressive literature about alternative understandings of Puerto Rican politics (Gil, 1994; Negrón-Muntaner, 2007), opened up a new and pertinent research question: *What is the relationship between the structural dominance of the status question and everyday politics in Puerto Rico?*

3.4.3 The third trip

The third and final trip took place over ten months between August 2010 and May 2011. Having established my main research question, the immediate objective was to identify relevant institutional sites for investigating it. I needed a concrete political context in which to ground the Puerto Rican status debate. In this way the main research question above produced a secondary question, reflecting my interest in location as a geographer: *Where and how do positions on status influence everyday politics?* The longer-term, ultimate objective of this trip was to complete all fieldwork around these two research questions.

An August meeting with Luis Cámara-Fuertes, a quantitative political scientist in UPR, became a pivotal discussion in my search for research sites. He presented me with a copy of his new book, *La ideología de los legisladores puertorriqueños* (2010), which touched upon the tension between what gets

⁵ Though I reached the conclusion that my research up to this point was indeed different from Morris', which is about national identity through the lens of status rather than status per se, the similarities were sufficient to render it not so much a genuinely original contribution as a potentially useful adaptation or update of the book.

said about status (in political discourse) and what gets done about it (in political practice). In it he contends that status positions should have nothing to do with the vast majority of decisions taken in the central legislature, which pertain to other political issues. He shows through multiple regression analysis that if status position is literally removed from the ideological equation, legislators from the same party are exposed as having little else in common. Given that he had collected data from central political elites in his book, he suggested that I consider a municipal study of politicians and their ideological positions. He offered the example of 'Guaynabo City', a metropolitan municipality covered with English-language signage owing to the vehemently pro-statehood views of the mayor. On his advice, and through my continued cultural immersion, I selected two further municipalities for investigating the relationship between structural status politics and political practice. These case studies were selected on the grounds that they could represent the other two traditional status options – independence and autonomy – and their channelling through municipal identity. With the support of my supervisors, seven months were then spent collecting data within these municipalities.

Interviews took place with the political and bureaucratic elites in each site. However, before presenting myself to the municipalities, I dedicated the months of September and October to the acquisition of full functional fluency in Spanish. This was a conscious methodological decision. As Howard (1997: 28) puts it, "there is a lot to be said for waiting until you have gained a full grasp of the local language and the issues at stake before approaching key informants... You will then be in a position to pose more pertinent and penetrating questions and maximise the information gained from the interview". A lot of time was also invested in arranging these interviews, by way of email correspondence, numerous telephone conversations with municipal departments, and screening meetings with the gatekeeper assistants of important people. As Goldstein (2002: 671) notes, "for inside-the-beltway interviewing... a sustained time period 'in country' is key to making connections". "Being there" (2002: 671) over a long period was indeed a huge advantage as my participants were busy

elites. I could therefore adapt to last-minute interview cancellations and rearrangements, and be patient with participants who were initially unresponsive.

3.4.4 Logistical issues

I was a Visiting Scholar at UPR's Institute of Caribbean Studies (IEC) for semesters one and two of the 2010/2011 academic year, coinciding with the duration of my third trip. The IEC is an interdisciplinary research group in the Faculty of Social Sciences and publisher of the journal *Caribbean Studies*. Not only was this institutional affiliation an honour, it also brought a handful of practical advantages. First, it gave my presence and purpose in Puerto Rico a formality and legitimacy which was definitely helpful in securing interviews with certain political elites. Second, I was provided with excellent resources: not only a desk and internet access but my own office, telephone, printing facilities, and air conditioning (a precious commodity on a humid island). The office was useful in a professional as well as practical sense, becoming the meeting point for a handful of interviews. Third, my institutional affiliation cemented my presence within the university itself, which was central to further contact building and meetings with members of staff who were interested in my research and able to offer their insights. Fourth, my position as a Visiting Scholar was marked by a public lecture I gave about my research in May 2011 as part of the Institute's *Conferencias Caribeñas* series. This recorded event was an invaluable experience, with the subsequent discussion about status between UPR academics, students and members of the public providing hugely revealing, rich information about the status question.

Although English exists alongside Spanish as an official language of Puerto Rico, Spanish is undoubtedly the first language of its people, taking precedence in everyday life, politics, government and business. Further, despite its coeval official status, English is poorly spoken on Puerto Rico, with census data estimating that only 18% of the population speaks it fluently (Pousada,

2008: 138). While some of the island's political and bureaucratic elites are bilingual – usually the result of a mainland university education or diasporic experience – many are not. Further, one of the ironies of Puerto Rican status politics is that supporters of the independence and Commonwealth parties tend to speak better English than those of the pro-statehood party, many of whom are monolingual and tend to have the lowest levels of education (Cámara-Fuertes and Rosas-Cintrón, 2004: 170). Therefore, while the pro-statehood PNP has been known to (misleadingly) claim that Puerto Ricans are bilingual and hence linguistically compatible with the fifty states, I could never assume bilingualism of any of my interviewees. This logistical reality informed my decision to learn Puerto Rican Spanish.⁶

Puerto Rico falls under the jurisdiction of US Customs and Border Protection, one of the many federal institutions in place on the island. This means that international travel to Puerto Rico is treated as arrival into the United States, even though Puerto Rico is not part of the United States. I therefore conducted fieldwork under a B1 US business visa. Transport was an issue that required daily negotiation in Puerto Rico. As a society Puerto Rico is extremely dependent upon the private car and has a very limited public transportation infrastructure. Indeed, Ortiz-Negrón (2007: 44) describes the island's urban geography – “where suburbs and highways have at the centre a mall and are linked by cars” – as “the spatial surface of Puerto Rico”. I therefore chose to live in parts of San Juan with the best connections to available public transport and the university: Río Piedras and Old San Juan. However, in a true display of national hospitality, Puerto Ricans offered me lifts almost everywhere. Whenever a bus or train could not get me to an interview, a friend would always be available to help.

⁶ Standard Puerto Rican Spanish is unique in dialect, pronunciation and vocabulary when compared with the dominant forms of Spanish found in Latin America, Europe and other parts of the Caribbean (Carroll, 2008: 99). Non-standard varieties of Spanish are also widely spoken on the island, such as Spanglish (the use of English vocabulary in everyday talk as a substitute for Spanish words) and code-switching (the bilingual practice of jumping between Spanish and English, often mid-sentence) (Pousada, 2008).

3.5 The white British outsider

This section builds on the last by accounting for the multiple ways in which I believe my identity as a white British researcher significantly influenced the development and progress of my research in Puerto Rico. I expand the following discussion of my field experiences in dialogue with ideas about the Caribbean mindset drawn from important writers of the region, including George Lamming, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris. With reference to the concept of positionality, I explore how my status as an 'outsider' to Puerto Rico had intellectual as well as practical effects. Specifically, it is likely that my Britishness influenced the research in multiple, advantageous ways. These brief reflections attempt to contribute to the presently small body of methodological discussion about positionality in Caribbean geographical research (Kingsbury and Klak, 2005). This is particularly necessary given the noted tendency of Anglo-American geographers of Latin America to pursue 'objective' or 'value-free' knowledge (Sundberg, 2005: 17).

Positionality focuses the researcher on their individual relationship to the field in terms of personal characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, social status, language, political stance, gender and sexuality (England, 1994). The purpose of discussing it is not to overcome these characteristics in a search for objectivity or detachment – what Haraway (1989: 584) calls an impossible 'God trick' - but to account for and write them into the research in order to reduce research bias. As Griffiths (1998: 133) explains: "bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them". Positionality becomes particularly important in the context of research about the Caribbean, a region that has been shaped by centuries of colonial power relationships. Lamming (1985) notes that

[a] concept of people or place does not arrive out of the blue. How you come to think of where you are, and of your relation to where you are, is dependent on the character and the nature of the power of where you are. You yourself do not decide who you are and what your relationship should be to where you are: a

certain prevailing power does that. (Lamming, 1985; in Birbalsingh, 1996: 2)

Puerto Rico's relationships to colonial power are principally defined by four hundred years of Spanish colonialism and a further one hundred years of US territorial occupation, beginning with the 1898 invasion and stretching to the present day. While the United Kingdom never colonised Puerto Rico (in spite of four attempted invasions in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries), its historical and contemporary relationship to the Caribbean as a whole – not to mention the United States – mean it likely that my Britishness still had colonial effects in Puerto Rico. I had entered the Caribbean with a research identity that was linked to “centuries of intellectual and psychological (not to mention physical) impositions” in the region (Nisco, 2005: 1). As Walcott (1995: 301) notes, referring to the colonising influence of past UK scholarship, “the Antillean archipelago was there to be written about, not to write itself”.

A number of research participants – the central political elites in particular – were white descendants of powerful European families that had settled in Puerto Rico during the Spanish colonial era. More generally, most Puerto Ricans understand themselves as the product of a historical mixture of European, indigenous and African ethnicities and influences – often in that order of importance (Jiménez Román, 1996: 8). I noticed that many people who were instrumental to my research had felt some connection to the ‘Old World’. As Walcott (1987) writes, these connections are a significant element of the Caribbean mindset and illustrate the consequences of colonialism for the forging of contemporary Caribbean identities. His poetry explores the idea of ‘in-betweenness’ to account for the way in which colonial subjects construct their personal and national identities with reference to a blend of competing cultural models, influences and loyalties (1987: 18). As such, he argues, Caribbean peoples are intimately aware of the relationships between their selves and larger social realities and historical processes. I believe this mindset made me interesting to participants – the top elites in particular – as it was easy for them to establish an affinity with me based on historical or even ethnic

common ground. One participant, for example, proudly mentioned that his great grandfather was British.

My British identity may also have been advantageous in that it connected with Puerto Rican understandings of prestige, fostering feelings of respect and admiration that could be rooted in a colonial imagination. Lamming (2002) notes that a colonial 'consciousness' has resulted from the systematic attempts of metropolitan rulers to inculcate metropolitan values, images and histories in the Caribbean region - particularly through education. "England", he writes, "was the name of a responsibility whose origin may have coincided with the beginning of time" (2002: 1). Similarly, during the first half of the 20th Century Puerto Rico was subjected to the "civilizing mission" of Americanisation, which established English as the language of school instruction and strongly encouraged the population to look towards the United States (Rodríguez Domínguez, 2005: 93). While these policies ultimately failed, to this day prestige is conferred to Puerto Ricans who are fluent in English (Lazú and Negrón, 2000).

These realities may have enhanced my own prestige and eased my integration into the field. First, it is possible that I was seen as an 'Old World' native speaker of English, and therefore something of a novelty on the island. In this respect, the people of Puerto Rico were very interested in me and extremely helpful. They appeared to be flattered that I had travelled so far to study their island without having any prior connection to it, and respected my efforts to learn Spanish, even though English is one of Puerto Rico's official languages. Second, a number of research participants were educated in prestigious metropolitan universities in the United States, and in one case, the United Kingdom. This increased their affinity with me and boosted my imagined importance. In a revealing slip of the tongue at a book release, one senator introduced me to his fellow party members as an Oxford scholar.

It is also possible that my Britishness was beneficial to my reception in the University of Puerto Rico. During my first trip I introduced myself to its Institute of Caribbean Studies (IEC). Founded in 1960, the IEC was one of the

first locally based academic institutions concerned with studying the region from an “inter-Caribbean orientation” (Brathwaite, 1975: 2). Its foundational interest in forging links between multiple Caribbean perspectives resonates with Harris’ (2006; in Jaggi, 2006) call for a ‘cross-cultural vision’ in the region. According to this vision, “one faction of humanity discovers itself in another; both sides benefit from opening themselves to a new universe” (2006: 1). He contends that an attentiveness to other worldviews can challenge “the ritual habit, ritual normality that seals our eyes and ears”, meaning that “you can advance, see things you never saw before, move out of boundaries that have been a prison” (2006: 1). I was able to benefit from this very mindset in the IEC, which offered an intellectual environment of openness, interdisciplinarity and collaboration. The institute welcomed my interest in Puerto Rico’s status issues as a British scholar. Indeed, I believe its members saw the opportunity for a fresh perspective on Puerto Rico’s oldest, and currently deadlocked, political question.

Finally, my outsider status offered practical advantages that were crucial to the development and progress of this study. Politically, it positioned me beyond the island’s partisan affiliations and divisions, which have deep roots in Puerto Rican culture and society (Cámara-Fuertes, 2004). Therefore, my outsider status likely aided my access to all political parties. Howard (1997: 24) notes that “the actual or perceived political affiliation of the researcher... has an important bearing on the outcome of research”. In order to access the most powerful political figures, I emphasised both my interest in their opinions on the status question and my outsider position as a British researcher. I predicted that some respondents would see the interview as a straightforward opportunity to advance their own positions on status to an interested (and possibly unknowing) young scholar. As Morris (2009: 211) puts it, “elite respondents [often] agree to be interviewed as they have something to say, and will use an interview to present themselves in a good light, not be indiscreet, to convey a particular version of events, to get arguments and points of view

across, to deride or displace other interpretations and points of view". The response rate to my requests for interview was high.

However, it is possible that my institutional affiliation with the University of Puerto Rico negatively affected my reception by those participants who were less forthcoming. UPR has a popular reputation as a hotbed of *independentista* scholarship and activism (Gil, 1994). Further, during fieldwork in 2011 the university became the site of a massive student-led strike resisting the education policies of the incumbent pro-statehood PNP. The movement also received the support of a number of teaching and faculty staff. In this context, one of the most important interviewees to my study – a PNP leader – was also proving to be the most elusive. Therefore, during the eventual screening meeting with his personal assistant I was careful to present myself as a British outsider, related to the university only as a visitor.

3.6 The municipal focus

This section justifies the project's empirical focus on the everyday politics of three particular Puerto Rican municipalities, as selected during the third trip. First, I explain why the municipal (local) is the ideal scale for my investigation of the relationship between the structural dominance of status and everyday politics. My selection of this scale was informed by theoretical as well as practical issues. Second, I elaborate on the logic that informed the choice of three municipalities in particular which, as mentioned in the last section, were taken as case study sites for investigating Puerto Rican politics in practice as set against the status question.

3.6.1 *Justifying the local*

Theoretically, the justification for a local study of the Puerto Rican status question rests on a move away from the debate's ontological foundation upon the scales of nation, state and nation-state. The previous chapter attempted to

demonstrate that the status question shall remain self-reinforcing so long as research on Puerto Rican politics continues to privilege these scales. This restrictive framing of politics is called methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003). In contrast, my study focuses on the local in order to examine the relationship between central party positions and everyday political practice. This enables an analysis of the way in which the hegemony of the status question is reinforced, modified and resisted through performances of local political power. The literature also highlights that the local political scale, and political decision-making, are understudied areas in scholarship on Puerto Rican politics.

Practically, the local scale is represented by Puerto Rico's municipalities, the 78 administrative and territorial divisions of the local state. Given that the local legislative process of each municipality is overseen by local members of the central political parties, the municipalities offer an opportunity to consider the impact of status - that which defines politicians centrally and structurally - upon everyday political work performed locally. There are also sampling advantages to a particular focus on the local political elites of the municipalities. The fact that minority party representation is guaranteed in all municipal legislatures (OMB, 2012: 25) offers the potential for an assessment of the impact of structural politics on everyday politics in a cross-partisan way. As Anderson (1988: 12) points out, there has been "in effect an evenly-balanced two-party system" in place in Puerto Rico since the foundation of the PNP in 1968. So, unlike the central legislature, where the PIP have never made significant electoral inroads, the municipalities guarantee the local legislative involvement of all three main political factions on Puerto Rico: the statehood party, the Commonwealth party, and the independence party.

3.6.2 Selection of case studies

The selection of three municipalities followed principles of case study sampling. Yin (2003: 13) defines a case study as "an empirical enquiry that

investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". This definition is particularly apt since the literature on status has never clarified what its 'real-life context' actually is. I therefore used case studies to establish the extent and significance of the status phenomenon.

In order to investigate the relationship between the structural politics of status and the everyday politics of the municipalities, my logic was to identify three municipalities – each dominated by a different political party – where the structural politics of status were clearly manifested. I attempted to go about this in two ways. First, local electoral figures from the State Electoral Commission of Puerto Rico, accessed via an online database (Álvarez-Rivera, 2010), were used to determine local party political strongholds. A link was assumed between local party strength and consensus around the status question in the local ruling political class, simply because in Puerto Rico status is the only ideological cleavage that clearly defines the parties (Cámara-Fuertes, 2004; 2010). Further, an extremely strong correlation has been noted in the municipalities between support for a particular status option in a plebiscite and a vote for the corresponding party in local elections (Barreto, 2000a: 218). Therefore, my thinking was that within the municipal strongholds of the parties, a greater consensus around the status question amongst legislators and administrators, backed up with greater support from the voting public, could potentially reveal more work being done at the local level to promote that status position in everyday political practice.

Second, beyond electoral figures past and present, I also paid attention to the political histories and contemporary identities of the municipalities. This was because the three traditional status options could not all be represented by electoral figures alone. Specifically, no political party advocating independence for Puerto Rico has ever been a significant electoral force, at either the local or central level. As such, it was not possible to use electoral data to identify an *independentista* municipality or region. However, a broader consideration of local political history and contemporary cultural identity revealed a standout

municipality with deep roots in the independence movement, commemorated to this day in its town slogan. Indeed, as outlined in section 3.4.3, municipal identity and landscape had already been considered significant sites for the expression of status positions.

The considerations of historic electoral strength and contemporary municipal identity, as well as the recommendations of UPR academics, led me to select the following three case study sites for fieldwork (Figure 3.1). The first is Guaynabo, a metropolitan municipality to the west of San Juan, and a stronghold of the pro-statehood PNP. It has a distinctive English-language municipal slogan, *Guaynabo City*, and placed English-language street signage throughout its territory. The second is Caguas, a stronghold of the autonomist, pro-Commonwealth PDP in the central-eastern region south of San Juan. Like Guaynabo, it has a distinctive municipal slogan declaring itself a ‘New Country’. The third is Lares, a rural municipality in the central-western region. Its slogan ‘City of the Shout’ remembers the island’s only declaration of independence, announced by nationalists from the town square in 1868.

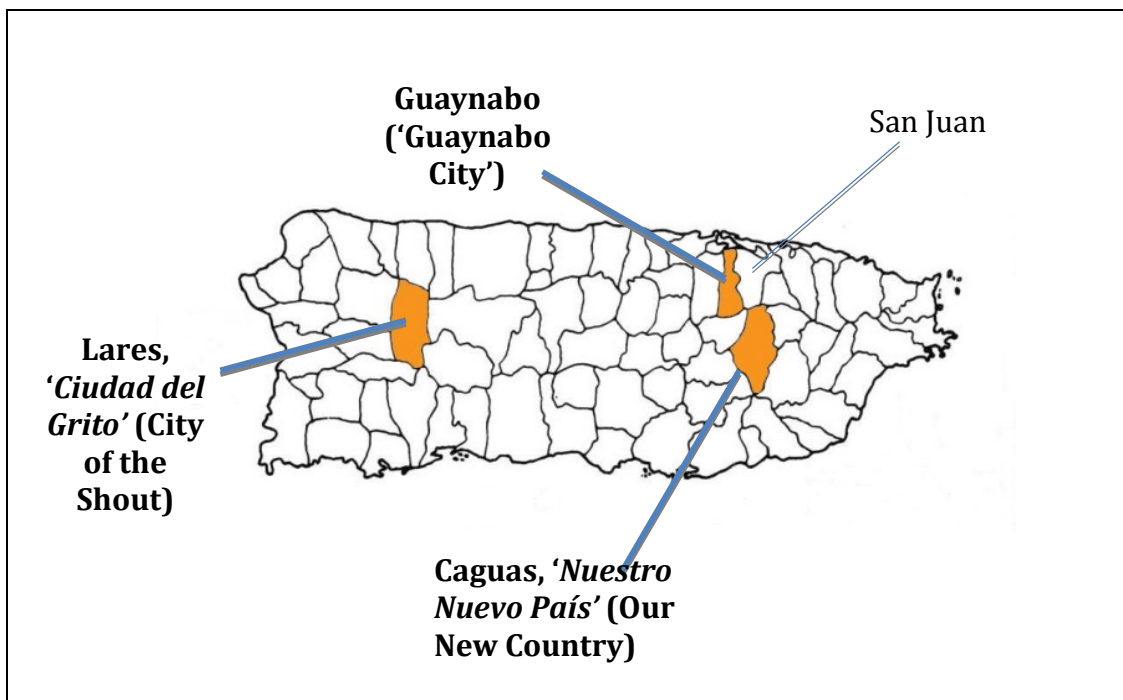


Figure 3.1: Location of municipal research sites

3.7 Research strategies: ethnography and triangulation

My work adopts an ethnographic research strategy. Ethnography entails the study of social phenomena by “entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people in their everyday lives” (Tedlock, 2000: 456). Several aspects of this approach are suited to my research and its aims. First, it places a strong emphasis on exploring the nature and complexity of the social phenomena in question. In other words, the ethnographer sets out to fully understand the issue in context, refusing to make a priori assumptions about it as per other strategies such as hypothesis testing (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 110). Put this way, an ethnography of the status question is well overdue. Status, and the discursive logics that underpin it, have been privileged to such an extent in Puerto Rico that the phenomenon itself has largely escaped empirical scrutiny. An ethnography of status therefore looks to ground the issue in a domestic empirical context, refusing to assume that its dominance and importance are self-evident realities of Puerto Rican politics.

Second, ethnography makes the ontological assumption that social phenomena are brought into being through the everyday lives and practices of people. It therefore involves “participating in people’s daily lives..., watching what happens, listening to what is said, [and] asking questions” (Atkinson and Hamersley, 1998: 1). Studying the everyday working lives of political decision makers in Puerto Rico will shed light on their practices, motivations and behaviours and, importantly, reveal the ways in which these could be related to their status positions. Third, ethnography is an intensive approach that requires researchers to immerse themselves in the culture of interest for an extended period of time while maintaining a flexible attitude towards it. Section 3.4 above, which explained the evolution of my research over three extended fieldwork trips, represents a summary of my ethnographic engagement with the field.

A fourth important aspect of ethnography is that it subordinates methods and data collection to the research question and circumstances of the

field (Flick, 2009: 234). It emphasises “practicing a general research attitude” (2009: 233) involving the deployment of various methods to achieve an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon. My ‘general research attitude’ is represented by my attempt to engage with Puerto Rican politics from a different mindset, as outlined in sections 3.3 and 3.4. The research questions were formulated through this practice, and methods then selected according to their value in yielding information about the phenomena of status and everyday politics in the case study sites.

Ethnography uses several methods in ‘triangulation’ in order to reveal multiple aspects of the single phenomenon under study (Silverman 1997:85). Triangulation is a multi-method research strategy designed to increase confidence in conclusions about the phenomenon by studying it from different viewpoints (Cohen et al, 2007: 141). It is a way of “cross-checking data” from multiple sources (O'Donoghue and Punch, 2003: 78) with the aim of searching for regularities. Other benefits include “creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging and integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem” (Thurmond, 2001: 254). This research triangulates semi-structured interviews, documents, images and field notes in the following results chapters in order to build a picture of the relationship between the status question and everyday politics in Puerto Rico.

3.8 Methods

3.8.1 *Semi-structured elite interviews*

Interviewing is the central component of the thesis’ data collection strategy. 47 people were interviewed throughout the research. Interviewing is the optimal method for investigating the relationship between political discourse and political practice in Puerto Rico. The principal source of information about this relationship is, necessarily, Puerto Rican politicians.

Politicians perform decision-making processes as actors but at the same time they have structural allegiances as members of a political party. This makes them optimally positioned research participants for a comparison of political structure and political practice. They are able to offer insights into the nature of the relationship under investigation through the dialogue of a research interview. As Lilleker (2003) notes, interviewing is a particularly advantageous data collection strategy in the context of political research:

Interviews... provide insights into events about which we know little: the activities that take place out of the public or media gaze, behind closed doors. We can learn more about the inner workings of the political process, the machinations between influential actors and how a sequence of events was viewed and responded to within the political machine... Suffice it to say that interviews can provide immense amounts of information that could not be gleaned from official published documents or contemporary media accounts. (2003: 208)

It is this process of politics in action, as it occurs "out of the public or media gaze", that the research intends to shed light upon. Though the status issue is structurally dominant and constantly reinforced through media channels in the Puerto Rican public sphere, very little is known about the relationship between what is publicly said about status and the everyday practice of Puerto Rican politics "off-stage" (Lilleker, 2003: 213). Puerto Rican politicians - who must align themselves with a status option and its discourses in order to practice politics - are the guardians of this information. As Lilleker (2003: 213) puts it, "no-one is able to offer the level of knowledge of an issue or aspect of government as one deeply involved within that area... Of course, politicians are also the only source for information on their own activities and motivations."

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Puerto Rican political and bureaucratic elites. At their most general interviews are "conversations with a purpose" in which participants "can explain the complexities and contradictions of their experiences and... describe the mundane details of their everyday lives" (Bryman, 1998; in Valentine, 2005: 111). This method is therefore suitable for investigating everyday politics in Puerto Rico. A semi-

structured form of interviewing was adopted, based around a list of pre-determined, open-ended questions that were addressed in the course of the conversation but not necessarily in a rigid order. This was to avoid disruption to the conversational flow and ensure "flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant" (Dunn, 2000: 52). Above all, a semi-structured format ensured a base level of structure to the dialogue according to my research interrogations and enabled the comparison of information provided by different participants around the same specified issues. It also ensured the coverage of all key issues in light of my non-native (and therefore imperfect) Spanish language skills.

I borrow Smith's (2006: 646) understanding of elites as "individuals who appear to routinely exercise power, without significant challenge to the legitimacy of their authority". This definition is helpful as it is consistent with my aim to investigate the processes through which the status question is legitimised as the organising principle of Puerto Rican politics and politicians. It also serves as a useful reminder of the need to avoid conducting uncritical research that serves these elites. Indeed, my purpose in critiquing the status question is not to side with any one elite position, but rather, to attempt to expose the power relations that its hegemony maintains. Following Aberbach and Rockman (2002) I split the elite as a broad group into two categories for investigation: the political elite (party political appointees in an important decision-making body of the state) and the bureaucratic elite ("high-level civil servants" also with the potential to influence policy making in the state apparatus (2002: 673)). Elite interviews took place with three different groups between the pilot and main study: Puerto Rican politicians at the central scale, politicians at the municipal scale, and civil service directors at the municipal scale. Pilot work focused on the first group, which as explained earlier in the chapter, led to an interest in the second and third groups for the main study.

Participants were selected according to the principle of 'purposeful sampling', where "people are chosen on the basis of their experience related to the research topic" (Longhurst, 2010: 108). This is also known as 'illustrative

sampling' (Valentine, 2005: 112). For pilot work central-level politicians were selected based upon their identified importance to the status debate and political party leadership during immersion in the field. These included legislators (representatives and senators) as well as other senior members, from the three main political parties. At the municipal level, the political elites selected included the mayor and three members of the municipal legislature, one from each of the main political parties. Municipal civil service directors (bureaucratic elites) were selected from key executive departments, including culture, economic development, budget, planning, federal affairs, public works, and education. This selection was repeated in each of the three municipalities: Guaynabo, Caguas, and Lares.

Subtly different interview designs were used with each group in recognition of their different positions, but they were broadly similar in their coverage of questions in three key areas (see Appendix 10.3 for full versions of the interview schedules). The first set of questions was designed to establish information about formal political structures in Puerto Rico. As a result they interrogate the status positions of politicians, which the literature suggests is the sole principle that organises and separates the parties. To gather information about any other principles of political structure, interviewees were asked what all members of their party had in common ideologically beyond a status preference. The second set of questions was about Puerto Rican political practice. This line of enquiry aimed to understand the forms in which everyday politics takes place in Puerto Rico, gathering descriptive information about the deliberations, disagreements, negotiations, compromises and conflicts that define the everyday political process.

The third set of questions - which form the crux of the project - combine elements of the first and second sets to investigate the relationship between formal political structure and political practice in Puerto Rico. The aim here was to investigate the relevance of the status question as a structural political principle to the conduct of everyday Puerto Rican politics. These questions were split into two parts in the main study. The first consisted of questions

about municipal identity which, as the previous section explained, was considered an example of the way in which status preferences (and therefore formal political structures) had some relation to local decision-making and local political power. The second part consisted of more general, open questions inviting the interviewee to think of any examples where they perceived that status issues had affected local decisions or events in the municipality. Clarifying questions were provided throughout the interview (in parentheses on the interview schedules) whenever required. The conversations began with an introduction and the presentation of a plain-language statement to the participant, and the three main parts of the interview were discussed between warm-up and warm-down questions.

With a handful of exceptions, interviews were conducted in the offices of participants. Valentine (2005: 118) notes that "talking to people on their own 'territory'... offers you the possibility to learn more about the person from seeing them in their own environment". As the following chapters shall display, some of my political interviewees had office workspaces that were quite revealing of their political views. Target participants were easily identified through public information. Most interviews were organised through email and telephone correspondence either with the participants themselves or gatekeeper employees such as aides and administrators.

3.8.2 Documents, images and field notes

Section 3.6.2 explained my use of case studies in the research. Another feature of a case study approach is its relatively unstructured and flexible nature. However, as Hall (2008: 116) argues, "this is a strength... rather than a weakness, as it gives the researcher scope to address the complexity of the social phenomena under investigation". Case study research therefore lends itself to the use of multiple methods in addressing complexity. Though interviewing is the principal data collection strategy for this research, the complexity of the phenomena under study - the structural principle of the status

question and everyday political practice - may also be illustrated using other sources, including documents, images, and my own fieldwork journal. The research incorporates this data into the ethnography according to the principle of triangulation outlined above.

My focus on elite groups in political institutions means there is potential for triangulation using documental evidence. As Herod (1999: 315) notes, elites "can often readily provide copious quantities of documents that their own institutions have produced which may be used... to verify what is said in an interview". Documents were collected in three ways. First, in the search for information about structural politics, election manifestos, pamphlets, and books were collected from the Central Committees of the political parties in San Juan. Second, information on political practice was collected in the form of public documents provided to me by the municipal governments that I had chosen to research. This included official promotional material, economic reports, summaries of legislative sessions, and newsletters about local issues and events. The third source of documents (for information on both structural politics and political practice) was the Puerto Rican press. Throughout fieldwork I kept a close eye on newspaper reporting about the status question, collecting much information about party political positions and practices from various articles, columns and contributions. Many of these were written by the central politicians themselves. I also collected articles about municipal affairs and events, including accounts of the city slogans.

I include in the analysis a selection of images from secondary sources as well as photos taken while in the field. Images sourced from secondary data are incorporated into analysis according to the principles of triangulation above. I use my own photographs in a more illustrative way, taking them as "visual supplement[s] to the written text" (Rose, 2007: 239). This is about capturing the 'texture' of place using visual information that would be difficult to capture in writing. Rose (2007: 247) notes that geographers are increasingly turning to photography as a method to convey "the elusive qualities that define sense of place". I put photography to this very use, supplementing my arguments with

images that convey the materiality of status positions in the municipalities. Visuality is an important component of my municipal interviews, as I have understood the concrete presence of the city slogans *Guaynabo City*, *Caguas*, *Nuestro Nuevo País*, and *Lares, Ciudad del Grito* as possible manifestations of structural status politics.

I kept a research diary throughout fieldwork. This filled up with ethnographic notes from every stage, and about the many aspects, of my research experience. It is a useful supplementary data source as it contains a wide range of evidence-based reflections on my immersion in Puerto Rican political culture. For example, notes were taken about public conferences with party leaders in UPR, political radio programmes, meetings with informants and academics, impromptu interviews in informal public settings (where a voice recorder was deemed inappropriate), my participation in two party-organised political rallies (which had undertones of the status question), and about my own public conference paper in UPR, in which I presented my research. The journal also contained ethnographic notes made while exploring my municipal field sites - observations about the town centres and the hallways and offices of government.

3.8.3 Analysis techniques: translation and coding

The majority of research interviews were conducted in Spanish and recorded on a portable mp3 device. Interviews were transcribed first in Spanish. Useful passages from the transcriptions based around key questions were then translated into English, according to the principle of equivalence, in preparation for coding analysis. The challenge of equivalence "consists in adequately grasping the complexity of meaning in the source language and trying to transfer it to the target language" with accuracy (Müller, 2007: 208). However, I acknowledge that translation can only ever be a partial and not total transference of meaning, as different languages structure the world in different ways, and linguistic expressions are embedded with contextually specific

cultural meanings (2007: 207). As such, when I transcribe words or phrases that are culturally specific to (Puerto Rican) Spanish, and which therefore defy easy translation, I preserve the Spanish-language wording in the translated excerpt and explain its meaning.

Coding is a form of analysis that is suited to ethnography and the comparison of cases (Flick, 2009: 402). It has therefore been applied in the present research to enable the comparison of data provided between my interviewees (at an individual level) as well as my case studies (at a municipal level). Coding is "the assigning of interpretive tags to text (or other material) based on categories or themes that are relevant to the research" (Cope, 2010: 440). The purpose of coding is to identify trends in the data in order to build empirical findings that may then speak back to the research literature. This technique was applied to all data from interviews, documents and field notes. Data was coded according to recurring emergent themes rather than a closed set of predetermined analytic categories.

Two specific coding techniques were applied. First, in order to gain a feel for the data, I noted down initial ideas in an unstructured way as they emerged from the texts. This is known as 'open coding' (Crang and Cook, 2007: 139). Second, following Cope (2010: 448), a dual coding process of first-level descriptive codes and second-level analytical codes was implemented. Descriptive codes use the respondent's own words as codes, as they appear *in vivo* in the text. Analytic codes then emerged from this process in order to attempt, after reflecting on the descriptive codes, to group them into theoretical categories that could be used to return to the literature and overall theoretical framework of the thesis. All coded data was then compared to determine areas of agreement and divergence under the three main themes of the research: political structure (status), everyday politics, and the relationship between the two.

3.8.4 *Fieldwork ethics*

Plain language statements were distributed to interviewees in order to obtain their consent to participate in my work (see Appendix 10.1). This document introduced my research, stated my wish to conduct a recorded interview, and outlined the measures I would take to protect participants, such as their rights to anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal. Anonymity was to be guaranteed on the interviewee's request; however, they were informed that it would be difficult in practice to totally conceal their identity owing to their status as public figures.⁷ This is in accordance with the guidelines on anonymity in the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (BSA, 2002). Confidentiality was offered to each participant through the provision of the mp3 recording via email, allowing him or her to then request the omission of any part of the conversation. Further, given the highly politicised nature of my research topic, it was of great importance to emphasise my position as an independent, neutral, foreign researcher with no affiliation to any political party or law enforcement agency. Consent was sought by verbal rather than signed agreement because this was most consistent with the openness and informality of Latin American culture. Pilot interviews acquainted me with the very Puerto Rican notion of *respeto* (respect) (Lauria, 1964), an unspoken social contract between individuals in which trust and fairness are assumed.

Finally, publicly funded researchers have an ethical duty to make their findings publicly available. Howard (1997: 21) notes that researchers owe a particular debt to the country that has hosted them, and that their affiliation with its institutions "can improve the prospects of the work serving a useful purpose for the people being studied". The findings of the present research will certainly be of interest to Puerto Ricans, who shall continue to passionately debate their island's formal political status. As mentioned, I delivered a conference paper about my research as part of my affiliation with UPR's

⁷ Most politicians and senior civil servants in Puerto Rico are easily identifiable just by virtue of their public position. For example, to refer to the Mayor of Guaynabo without name does not give him anonymity; it is common knowledge that he is Héctor O'Neill García.

Institute of Caribbean Studies in May 2011, and shall also provide the university with a copy of the completed thesis.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach that was adopted in the thesis. It explained how I applied an outsider's mindset to Puerto Rican political culture in order to develop a project that could make a new contribution to understandings of Puerto Rican politics and the status question. Specifically, this contribution would seek to interrogate, rather than uncritically foreground, the hegemonic discourses of status, colonialism and nationalism in Puerto Rico. Following an ethnographic research strategy, involving extensive overseas fieldwork and cultural immersion, I arrived at a project to investigate the relationship between the structural dominance of status and everyday politics, with a particular focus on the decision-making practices of political elites in three municipalities. My use of the municipal scale to investigate this relationship, the selection of three case study sites, and the focus on local political elites, were justified. The methods of data collection and analysis were outlined, and issues of positionality – as raised by the overseas context of this research - were discussed. This involved reflecting upon the likely influence of my own colonial subjectivity within a regional Caribbean mindset. The thesis is now in a position to present its findings. This begins in the following chapter, which explores the ways in which hegemony is evident in the Puerto Rican status question.

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4 (Contesting) the hegemony of the Puerto Rican status question

4.1 Introduction

This thesis is about how control over the political framework, and by extension, political discourses, influences practices of politics and power beyond the central state in Puerto Rico. The thesis examines this with reference to the status question and its relationship to everyday political practice in the municipalities. The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it explains the ways in which Puerto Rico's central political elites attempt to determine the framework for political discourse as the status question. Second, it unveils how the efforts of the political elites to set this framework obscure their own interests to control, or at least dominate, political power in Puerto Rico. Third, it discusses the structure of formal municipal politics and explains its potential to empower local political actors to appropriate, modify, resist or even subvert centrally prescribed political positions – in this case, status positions.

The chapter is framed theoretically by the concept of hegemony, as outlined in section 2.2.1. The first section briefly explores the current parameters of the status discourse by noting that its hegemony is produced between three main institutional sites: the Puerto Rican political parties, the United Nations, and US Congress. The chapter then focuses specifically on the parties. The second section examines the discursive tactics through which Puerto Rican political elites of all stripes attempt to persuade the majority to accept their cultural and political values as the natural 'order' (Jackson, 1989: 53). The third section looks to expose the ideological interests that hide behind these discourses (Jackson, 1989: 59). The fourth section considers the potential for hegemonic central positions – namely, status positions – to be complicated on the ground through performances of decentralised power. This chapter lays important ground for the following chapters, which explore in detail the relationship between the dominance of status and everyday political practices at the municipal scale.

4.2 What is the status question?

The status question is a discourse about the political future of Puerto Rico. It is important to understand that the status question originates, and is produced, in three main institutional sites. The first site is the Puerto Rican political parties. Each party establishes its status position through an internal status committee, which is composed of members of the central leadership. The agreed position is ratified by the party's central committee and reproduced in manuals, election manifestoes and plebiscite ballots as official policy. Membership of a party is confirmed by, and contingent upon, an agreement to defend the principles and positions contained within these documents (for example, PNP, 2009: 3; PDP, 2004: 1). Positions on status in this chapter are therefore garnered from central party political documents and interviews with a small sample of central political figures from the three main parties.

The second and third key institutions that produce the status discourse – the United Nations and the US Congress – are beyond Puerto Rico. While this chapter focuses on the Puerto Rican parties, it is important to first briefly acknowledge these two external institutions. Puerto Rico's status question is, in part, a construct of the foundational principles of the United Nations. Specifically, it manifests the principle of self-determination as outlined in Resolution 1514 (XV): "the inalienable right" of "all peoples" to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (UN, 1960a).⁸ This Resolution is the basis for the recognition of self-determination as a concept of international law. The Resolution further establishes the "sovereign rights of all peoples" to "complete independence" and a "national territory", and "solemnly proclaims the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations" (UN, 1960a).

⁸ Resolution 1514 (XV) is fully entitled the "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples", and commonly termed the "Magna Carta of decolonisation" by *independentistas* (Martín García, 2006: 9)

The aim of self-determination, therefore, is decolonisation. The UN recognises three legitimate decolonisation options in General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV): "emergence as a sovereign independent State", "integration with an independent State", and "free association with an independent State" (UN, 1960b). A fourth option was later recognised in Resolution 2625 (XXV), described as "the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people" (UN, 1970). The Puerto Rican status debate has formed around these options, with the PIP claiming the first, the PNP the second, a minority faction of the PDP the third, and the mainstream of the PDP contending that Puerto Rico has already formally decolonised according to the fourth. These UN resolutions deepen the parties' structure around the status question, as they are referenced in the manifestos and manuals of each party as evidence to support its status position.⁹

While the UN plays a significant role in producing the Puerto Rican status discourse, the most important external institution in this regard is US Congress. This is because Congress currently holds political sovereignty over the island, and as such, is deemed the legal arbiter of any status change (Negrón-Muntaner, 2007: 2). The status discourse of the Puerto Rican parties is strongly influenced by readings of US jurisprudence and what Congress has declared it is willing to accept. Its current position is indicated across three recent reports by the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status (Task Force, 2005; 2007; 2011). While the UN identifies status options that are open to Puerto Rico by international law, the Task Force more prescriptively "develops" options that are "compatible with the Constitution and basic laws and policies of the United States" (Task Force, 2007: 1). These are current Commonwealth, statehood, independence, and free association.

The Task Force adopts the following positions on these options. First, it defines Commonwealth as a local governmental arrangement and not a legally separate political status, which exists beneath the Territorial Clause of the US

⁹ See, for example, the 2013 election manifestos of the PNP (2012: 390) and PIP (2012: 4), and the PDP's (2010: 54) current party manual *Pacto de Futuro*.

Constitution.¹⁰ Thus, Puerto Rico's current legal political status is that of a US territory. As will be explained, this assessment conflicts with the official position of the PDP, which interprets Commonwealth as a formally decolonial, not territorial, status. The Task Force underlines that Congress holds sovereignty over Puerto Rico under the Territory Clause. Congress may, therefore, "continue the current system indefinitely, but it also may revise or revoke it at any time" (Task Force, 2005: 5), and even "ced[e] the territory to another nation" (2005: 5). Second, statehood would simply grant Puerto Rico "equal footing with the original States in all respects" (2005: 6). However, while discussing statehood the Task Force underlines Puerto Rico's present status as an "unincorporated" territory, "which means that it is not intended to become a State" (2005: 6).

Third, independence would involve the United States relinquishing sovereignty over Puerto Rico to a "separate, independent sovereign nation" (Task Force, 2007: 10). However, as the current sovereign power over Puerto Rico, the United States "may determine whether and upon what conditions [it] may receive independence" (Task Force, 2005: 6). Notably, Puerto Rico "would not automatically be entitled to receive monetary support or military protection from the US" (Task Force, 2007: 7). Fourth, free association is suggested as an alternative to full independence, along the lines of the compacts between the United States and Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands (2007: 14). Although Congress does not officially express a preference for any status option, the Task Force's most recent report (Task Force, 2011) would appear to implicitly favour the status quo. While another plebiscite is recommended, the report's principal focus is to "bridge gaps in order to ensure a more effective partnership" between the US Federal and Puerto Rican governments (2011: foreword). In other words, pending a status decision, the Task Force suggests a strengthening of ties between Puerto Rico and the United States in the pursuit

¹⁰ Article IV, Section 3, Clause 2 of the US Constitution outlines the plenary authority of Congress "to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other property belonging to the United States" (in Smith, 2007: 279).

of more immediate questions such as economic development, job creation, education and healthcare (2011: 6).

In sum, US Congress is the key battleground for Puerto Rican status politics beyond the island. Representatives of the three main parties routinely travel to Washington to attend Congressional hearings on status, where they debate and contest these definitions and lobby for federally-sanctioned plebiscites, using all available juridical tools to search for binding decisions. The outcomes of such hearings influence the parties to revise and rearticulate their status positions to voters back in Puerto Rico. Having briefly acknowledged the importance of the United Nations and US Congress as external producers of status, the rest of the chapter focuses on the construction of status discourses through the key domestic institutions: the parties.

4.3 Status: the publicly stated agendas

This section establishes that hegemony is evident in the dominance of the status question in Puerto Rico. Peet (2007: 19) notes that "in order to explore the workings of hegemony, it is necessary to focus on the exact agencies that produce definite ideologies as specific discourses". The previous chapter explained that during fieldwork the three main political parties were identified as the key agencies in Puerto Rico. This section therefore focuses on the parties as the main institutions on the island that produce and mobilise discourses of the status question. Collectively the parties may be understood as Foucault's 'community of experts' (2007: 20) in the sense that they form an "elite group controlling an area of knowledge and expertise, and forming the base for a policy regime, similarly understood as a discursive formation" (2007: 20). Hegemony is a process that is led by elites to advance certain ideological agendas. However, the agendas that the elites state publicly might act as a cover for those they attempt to conceal. This section focuses on the discourses that constitute the publicly stated agendas.

The political parties claim to either want to change Puerto Rico's status (the PNP and PIP position) or to modify and perfect the autonomous status quo (the PDP position). This discussion demonstrates the powers of persuasion that underlie their messages. It is about the ways in which the powerful political elites attempt to convince that their status option is in the best interests of 'the people', such that they become complicit in advancing these ideas and practices. The key arguments and counterarguments are grouped under the following themes: state power, colonialism and decolonisation, the nation, and fear. While the discourses of statehood, Commonwealth and independence compete for hegemony in Puerto Rico, this chapter contends that the tensions, entanglements and interdependencies that arise from their performance ultimately serve to cement as hegemonic the status question itself.

4.3.1 State power

While the status discourse is ostensibly about the self-determination and decolonisation of the Puerto Rican people, it is fundamentally about different party political proposals for shifting the balance of powers between the metropolitan and colonial state. Each party attempts to convince the masses that their proposed changes to the central state amount to a decolonisation of the Puerto Rican people. However, at its core status is a question about the blend of state powers to be designated to Puerto Rico's political class. Progressive Puerto Rican scholars are therefore correct to note that Puerto Rican status is essentially a question about competing versions of a modified state form (Picó, 2007: 27). It is about the sovereignty of the state - that is, of the political and economic groups that control it - and not necessarily a sovereignty of the people (Pabón, 2007: 69).

Independence, as advocated by the PIP, is about the formation of a separate nation-state for Puerto Rico. Full political and economic powers would be awarded to the new state in a transfer of sovereignty from the US Congress to the Republic of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico would be recognised in

international political and economic forums and be able to negotiate trade agreements with other sovereign nations. Moreover, citizens would swear loyalty to the apparatus of the new state. In the words of the PIP's entry on the 1998 plebiscite ballot, independence entails

[t]he recognition that Puerto Rico is a sovereign republic with full authority over its territory and international relations, with a Constitution that shall be the Supreme Law... The residents of Puerto Rico shall owe allegiance to, and shall have the citizenship and nationality of, the Republic of Puerto Rico. (CEE, 1998)

The PIP also contends that independence offers Puerto Rico the necessary tools to secure economic prosperity: "only independence provides us with the sovereign powers we need to protect our industry, commerce and agriculture, and enter into treaties" (2007: 7). This represents a traditional, state-centred view of power that assumes nation-states are able to effectively exercise control over territorially-defined, parcelled economies and societies (Allen, 2004).

Statehood entails the full integration of Puerto Rico into an existing nation-state, the United States, as a federated state of the Union. Fundamentally the PNP presents its statehood discourse as the claiming of civil (individual) rights on the metropolitan state based on the US citizenship of Puerto Ricans. According to the 2012 ballot, statehood guarantees that

all United States citizens residing in Puerto Rico may have rights, benefits, and responsibilities equal to those enjoyed by all other citizens of the states of the Union, and be entitled to full representation in Congress and to participate in the Presidential elections (CEE, 2012)

Puerto Ricans would have the right to elect and send to US Congress a delegation of two senators and, according to the island's current population, five representatives. Economically, they would receive equal treatment with other states in all federal programs – notably, benefits. At present the welfare entitlements of Puerto Ricans are capped well beneath the figures enjoyed by US citizens in the states, because under the Territorial Clause Puerto Rico is "subject only to the most fundamental provisions of the US Constitution" (Task Force, 2005: 7). However, with statehood US federal income taxation would be

applied to Puerto Rico; under the current Commonwealth state form Puerto Ricans are exempt.

The statehood position contends that Puerto Rico already possesses many attributes of a state of the union. Indeed, most key federal government institutions are in place on the island, including those responsible for citizenship, currency, customs and immigration, defense, and courts. Federal law already applies to Puerto Rico. Since 1992 all federal departments and agencies have been ordered to “treat Puerto Rico administratively as if it were a state” (Task Force, 2007: Appendix A). The PNP draws attention to this situation to emphasise the closeness between Puerto Rico and the United States. Institutionally, they argue, all that distinguishes Puerto Rico from the 50 states is its lack of representation in the federal government’s political institution: Congress. This is where the most far-reaching modifications to state structure would take place if Puerto Rico were granted statehood. Five new representatives would need to be accommodated in the House, either by increasing the total number of seats, or maintaining the current statutory limit of 435 and removing five seats from existing states (Crocker, 2011: 10).

The statehood argument is founded on an assumption that the people of Puerto Rico have demonstrated their loyalty to the institutions of the US state. This loyalty should be rewarded with the concession of a federated state form. In the words of former governor Carlos Romero-Barceló:

Throughout this century, in war and peace alike, we Puerto Ricans have demonstrated our loyalty to the principles of American democracy and to the private enterprise system, and... it is now high time we were granted the equality that our loyalty has earned, and to which our citizenship entitles us. (Romero-Barceló, 1980: 77)

However, this discourse incorrectly assumes that Puerto Ricans are naturally 'entitled' to the full benefits of statehood by virtue of their US citizenship. In fact, the right to these benefits corresponds to the federated states of the union as institutions, and not to US citizens as individuals. For example, any Puerto Rican who mobilises their US citizenship to move to the United States

automatically gains the right to vote for Congressmen, or claim greater social assistance, in their state of residence. Likewise, a US citizen from any of the fifty federated states forfeits their right to vote if they move to Puerto Rico, "even if they are Anglo-Saxon, blonde and blue-eyed" (Rivera Ortiz, 2007: 12).

The PDP argues for modifications to the existing state form to create an 'enhanced' or 'new' Commonwealth. It contends that the current Commonwealth, as established in 1952, is an autonomous, internationally recognised relationship with the United States that is non-colonial and non-territorial. In this view Puerto Rico is not a territory of the United States subject to its Territorial Clause, nor a state of the Union, nor an independent nation-state. Rather, it is "a state whose foundation depends on thwarting the nation-state model" (Soto-Crespo, 2006: 733). In other words, it undercuts the nationalist logic that all peoples who self-identify as cultural nations should organise politically as independent states.

According to the PDP, Commonwealth is a unique state form in the nature of a compact agreed between two sovereign nations. Sovereignty over Puerto Rico does not lie in US Congress but rather in the "People of Puerto Rico", who are the "ultimate source of political power" (PDP, 2010: 81). The Commonwealth compact constitutes a "permanent union" that "cannot be broken nor altered" (2010: 95) without the mutual consent of both nations. As such it guarantees Puerto Ricans a number of mainland federal institutions, including the so-called "four pillars of Commonwealth": "common citizenship, currency, defense and market" (PDP, 2010: 96).

However, such a compact was never signed and has never legally existed. Rather, the PDP contends that the above state form is evoked in the combination of the 1952 Constitution of Puerto Rico and the 1950 Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act of US Congress. The current official position of the PDP therefore proposes a "Pact of the Future": a "document signed by both peoples that clearly and precisely defines the jurisdictional ambit of both the Government of the Commonwealth and the Government of the United States in

Puerto Rico” (2010: 99). This pact would form the basis for the PDP’s demand for a so-called ‘enhanced’ or ‘new’ Commonwealth.

The PDP argues that under enhanced Commonwealth, the United States would recognise the sovereignty of the People of Puerto Rico to delegate to the United States all state powers it does not wish to retain. From this position Puerto Ricans could enjoy all the freedoms of independence, such as membership in international political and economic institutions. At the same time they could retain an advantageous economic position within the US system by delegating citizenship functions back to the US and keeping their entitlements to federal welfare. Ultimately the PDP argues that political sovereignty is a characteristic that is inherent to ‘peoples’ and not to states. The US Congress does not agree, however, and has ruled the enhanced Commonwealth proposal to be impossible under the US Constitution (Raben, 2001: 4; in Task Force, 2007: Appendix E).

4.3.2 *Colonialism and decolonisation*

This section demonstrates that party political arguments for (and against) the state powers above are based on different understandings of colonialism and decolonisation. Consistent with the literature outlined in sections 2.4 and 2.5.2, these discourses are central to the status debate and are publicly circulated and performed by the parties.

The starting point for the pro-independence argument is that Puerto Rico is a colony. As one PIP party leaflet puts it: “Colonialism is the root of many of our gravest economic and social problems because we lack the powers we need to fully develop ourselves... In the 21st Century, when the whole world has been liberated from colonialism, Puerto Rico is still a colony” (PIP, 2012: 1). The PIP attacks the Commonwealth status quo as “colonialism with a long chain”, “pure makeup”, and “a cynical public relations exercise” (Martín García, 2006: 18-19). Moreover decolonisation, as the realisation of full self-

government, is described as a moral imperative. In the words of one party leader:

We think that sovereignty is a moral necessity, a question of honour. That's because without freedom there is no responsibility... and without responsibility there is no virtue.
(PIP Interviewee)

It is clear that the status issue, colonialism and decolonisation have monopolized the PIP's understanding of what constitutes politics. The following statement by party president Rubén Berríos Martínez about the 2012 plebiscite directly reflects Pabón's (2007: 69) critique that "status is like a black hole that swallows every political space in Puerto Rico":

The status consultation to take place on 6 November [2012] will initiate a process that shall open the doors to our decolonisation. Following the plebiscite one shall speak of a before and an after in Puerto Rican politics. (PIP, 2012: 1¹¹)

The PIP attempts to persuade that self-government is the responsibility and destiny of all peoples. A party pamphlet uses the metaphor of a house to explain this: "Independence means for countries what being in charge of one's own house means for adults. It is the form that practically all the peoples of the world have selected to govern themselves and be the owners of their own destiny" (PIP, 2007: 5). The PIP promotes decolonisation as a collective rather than individual process. Berríos Martínez makes this clear in his pamphlet *Un Mapa Para La Ruta*: "Puerto Rico's problem is not a problem of the denial of the right to vote, or of civil rights, it is a problem of national rights: of the inalienable right of a nation to govern itself." (Berríos Martínez, 2004: 7). However, this view - that Puerto Rico is a colony because it lacks collective freedom scaled at the nation - cannot consider the positive impact that US citizenship has had for Puerto Ricans as individuals claiming metropolitan rights to raise their living standards (Ortiz Rivera, 2007: 8).

¹¹ See Appendix 10.6.

The pro-statehood PNP, like the PIP, is adamant that Puerto Rico is a colony. Romero-Barceló suggests, for example, that “instead of celebrating the adoption of our local constitution [in 1952] as a giant step toward full local self-government, we should declare July 25 a day of shame and mourning for being the day when our people voted to become a colony by consent” (Romero-Barceló, 2009: 25). While *independentistas* assume the only important freedom is that of the national collective, statehooders understand decolonisation as a process of claiming full individual rights as citizens of the metropolis. As former governor Luis Fortuño puts it, “What is good for the Americans in all the States, must be equally good for the Americans in Puerto Rico too” (Fortuño, in PNP, 2012: 378).

While the statehood discourse does mention the individual political rights that Puerto Ricans would be entitled to enjoy, such as the right to vote for the US president and congressmen, greater emphasis appears to be placed upon the economic benefits that statehood would represent for individuals. This is well illustrated in the PNP’s ‘Statehood Academy’ educational document, which but mentions the presidential vote, and rather dedicates several pages to the current disparities between Puerto Rico and the mainland states in terms of average salary figures and welfare entitlements:

...as **First Class citizens**, they have **100%** access, **100%** of the time and in **100%** equality of conditions, of all the federal programs of education, health, economic assistance, assistance to establish businesses, housing and employment, amongst hundreds of other programs for which they qualify for being from a State (Academia Estadista, 2010: 7; bold in original)

The PDP position rejects the colonialism argument that is common to the PIP and PNP. It contends that Puerto Rico has already been decolonised in four ways. First, party founder, ex-governor and Commonwealth architect Luis Muñoz Marín claims that the establishment of this status in 1952 represented an “internal decolonisation” granting Puerto Ricans self-government over most insular affairs (Muñoz Marín, 1982; in Soto-Crespo, 2006: 714). Second, the party argues that Puerto Rico also experienced an ‘external’ decolonisation

upon its removal from the United Nations' list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1953. Given that the United Nations does not formally recognise Puerto Rico as a colony, Commonwealth supposedly enjoys “international validity” as a noncolonial status (PDP, 2010: 45).

Third, the PDP argues that the Puerto Rican people have continually endorsed Commonwealth status through the exercise of self-determination in three plebiscites since 1952, when the Commonwealth constitution was ratified by popular referendum. Moreover, the mainstream of the party contends that the sovereignty of the Puerto Rican people is already respected by the Commonwealth compact. They would appear to believe that this people-based sovereignty transcends the subordinate territorial relationship of the Puerto Rican state apparatus to the United States (Hernández Montañez, 2010: 25). However, a minority *soberanista* ('sovereignist') faction of the party counters the hegemonic mainstream position by insisting that the Territorial Clause continues to dominate and determine relations between Puerto Rico and the United States, making the island a colonial state. It is the tension between these two understandings of national sovereignty - of the people or the state - that is central to the divisions (Rivera Ortiz, 2010: 4). The thesis considers the *soberanista* position to be counter-hegemonic and will discuss it further in later chapters.

Fourth, the PDP claims Puerto Rico has been decolonised according to an alternative understanding of freedom that goes beyond state sovereignty. Muñoz Marín explained this in a 1959 Harvard lecture entitled 'Breakthrough from Nationalism':

I learned much from the wisdom of simple men and women, and that to them freedom is something deep in the heart, in the conscience, in everyday life, in personal dignity, in the furrow, the plow and the tools. I learned that among them, the nationalistic concept is as absent as the love of their native land is present; in its place there is a deep understanding of freedom. I learned that in their wisdom they preferred... to be governed respectfully from a distance rather than to be governed despotically from nearby. (Muñoz Marín, 1959: 6-7)

Purportedly, Puerto Ricans have transcended the emotions of political nationalism and created a new, imaginative form of political association well fitted to their needs and aspirations. This is a postnationalist perspective that understands decolonisation not as the establishment of or annexation to a sovereign state, but rather an everyday, lived freedom to pursue individual and collective goals. Ex-governor Rafael Hernández Colón champions the modern version of this discourse. Regarding colonialism, he suggests to “look at this issue another way”:

How many Puerto Ricans feel the alleged burden or oppression of colonialism from the US in their daily lives? How many really feel the alleged plenary powers of the US Congress are weighing down upon their aspiration to a better education, to live where they choose within their means, to get a better job or to speak their mind?... Life is infinitely larger than status, but a politicised political and media elite can't perceive the wide expanse of reality. In Puerto Rico, politics mostly means status... Colonialism is an ideological issue far removed from the daily lives of our people. (Hernández Colón, 2009a: 23)

Hernández Colón's views directly reflect the critiques of progressive scholars of the status question discussed in section 2.4.3 of the thesis. These critiques attempt to challenge status as the dominant discourse for understanding Puerto Rican politics and framing solutions to social problems. For example, he agrees with Laó (1997: 172) that colonialism is not the “prime mover determining and shaping all social life” in Puerto Rico. Likewise, the ex-governor's contention that “politics mostly means status” in Puerto Rico resonates with Pabón's (2007: 69) observation that the “discursive operation” of status “has tended to render invisible any other definition of what one could understand by politics”.

4.3.3 *The nation*

This subsection examines important differences in party arguments about Puerto Rico's relation to the national concept. By mobilising different understandings of nation, the parties attempt to persuade the Puerto Rican

people that they possess certain political characteristics which make them naturally compatible with a particular status option. While all parties generically construct Puerto Ricans as a people or collective group in order to enable the self-determination question, they do not uniformly agree that the Puerto Rican people constitute a nation. Rather, they relate the Puerto Rican people to the concepts of nation, citizenship and state in different ways.

The PIP maintains that Puerto Rico is, culturally, a nation. The specific political destiny of nationhood is independence; without its own state the nation is somehow incomplete. As Berríos Martínez (1997: 110) puts it, “independence provides the framework for... the full flowering and perpetuation of a nationality”. Another party leader agreed in interview:

I think the independence of a nation – and I say that my nation is Puerto Rico – is equivalent to personal freedom... Just as a person without their freedom is not a true person, so there is no true nation with juridical personality without sovereignty. (PIP interviewee)

The PIP position makes clear that a vote for statehood is a vote for another nationality. On the eve of the 2012 plebiscite Berríos Martínez (2012: 1) argued that voters once more face “the supreme definition” on the ballot: are they “Yankees or Puerto Ricans”? The PIP believes that citizenship should “naturally” follow nationality:

We have never been permitted to possess the citizenship that naturally corresponds to the Puerto Rican nationality of which we are part. Juridically, we have been denied the Puerto Rican citizenship that emanates from the sovereignty that we have been unable to exercise; however, what does have juridical recognition is a fictitious citizenship that does not correspond to our nationality. (PIP, n.d.: 38)

While the independence position contends that citizenship should follow nationality, the statehood position contends that nationality should follow citizenship. Given that Puerto Ricans are US citizens, they are therefore, nationally speaking, North Americans. As such, for most statehooders ‘Puerto Rican’ is a cultural or ethnic identity subsumed within an American nationality

that is legally determined by citizenship. The PNP very carefully never refers to Puerto Rico as a nation; rather, its nation is the United States. In this way Puerto Rican identity is constructed as compatible with statehood. There are many examples of this in party political material. An undated pamphlet collected from the Guaynabo municipal legislature, entitled *Celebrating American Citizenship*, reads:

We celebrate its arrival, comforted in the thought that even when we lack the total protection that being an American citizen provides, *we are and have been part of the great American Nation, and we walk together with our fellow citizens in the historic march towards the full enjoyment of life, freedom and democracy.*
(Municipio Autónomo de Guaynabo, n.d: 3; emphasis in original)

To take another example, former governor Luis Fortuño attacks both the PDP and PIP for believing in a Puerto Rican nationality separate from US citizenship:

It is undignified to be citizens of a nation without having the same rights as other fellow citizens... just as it is undignified to proclaim a national project being, collectively, citizens of another nation. (Fortuño, 2009: 18)

The PNP does not deny the existence of Puerto Rican identity. Indeed, it argues that its most potent symbols, such as the Spanish language, would be fully preserved under a 'creole statehood' (Meléndez, 1991: 136). Rather, the PNP attempts to account for Puerto Rican identity using alternative language to nation. Quoting party founder Luís Ferré, it speaks of 'homeland', interpreted as "an adherence to the heart of the place in which one is born" (Fortuño, 2009: 18). This frees up an understanding of nation as "a concept of political, social and human identification" separate from Puerto Rican culture (2009: 18). As such the PNP attempts to persuade that identifying with the US nation does not mean cultural assimilation (see section 4.3.4 below). From this point the party borrows an essentially nationalist logic - that nations should correspond to states - to argue for statehood. Puerto Ricans, as citizens of the US nation, should aspire to become its 51st state.

However, at the same time as insisting on the inassimilable characteristics of the Puerto Rican people, the PNP discourse contradicts itself

by drawing attention to ways in which it believes the United States has profoundly influenced Puerto Rican identity. For example, in the same source as above, Fortuño continues:

American citizenship is not in conflict with our Puerto Ricanness because our loyalty to the United States and love for Puerto Rico belong to two distinct but equally important aspects of our identity as a people. (2009: 18)

Here Fortuño controversially and explicitly states that loyalty to the United States is not only an important part of Puerto Rican identity, but that it is *as important* as a love for the island. This account of identity follows a (US) nationalist logic since it assumes that Puerto Ricans are loyal to the institutions of the national state to which they presently belong. A minority of statehooders go further to argue that Puerto Ricans are Americans culturally as well as nationally. According to this position Puerto Ricans are essentially Americans by their everyday practices, demonstrating loyalty to both US state institutions and a generic US national culture. As ex-senator Garriga-Picó argues in a 2005 newspaper column, Puerto Ricans have already assimilated culturally:

It doesn't matter how violently the nationalists react to this affirmation and how much Americanism they deny, the reality is that the construction of our social life takes place within a matrix of institutions, values and behaviours essentially taken from the American national community. (Garriga-Picó, 2005: 2)

He considers, for example, Puerto Rico's political system, market economy, car culture, fashion tastes, use of the dollar, and belief in the values of individual liberty and democracy to argue that Puerto Ricans have already culturally assimilated to the point that there is little identity distinction to even be made between 'Puerto Rican' and 'American':

Statehood is nothing other than the political arrangement that would give juridical and constitutional form to the reality that we Puerto Ricans are as much Americans as Puerto Ricans... The fundamental point is that I am a statehooder because, like you, I am American. (Garriga-Picó, 2002: 3).

Like *independentistas*, Commonwealth supporters maintain that Puerto Rico is a cultural nation, with a shared heritage, language, ethnicity and territory. However, they understand that the condition of being a nation is neither related to citizenship nor the state. In this way Commonwealth defies the concept of the nation-state, which is recognised by the independence and statehood positions. Commonwealth is postnational in that it promotes "an understanding of belonging where cultural affiliation functions outside of the nation-state construct" (Soto-Crespo, 2006: 734). For example, the current PDP party manual states that "Puerto Rico is a Nation... and we are so, because the nationality of a people is not subject to or conditioned by its political or juridical state" (PDP, 2010: 19). Further, Muñoz Marín critiqued the nation-state as early as 1959:

...Some of us confused love of the homeland with a narrow and petty concept of the national state. We felt that love of Puerto Rico had as a necessary corollary the desire for separate independence. We had not yet comprehended that no law, divine or human, demands that countries must be suspicious, vain and hostile, that they must live separate from other countries...
(Muñoz Marín, 1959: 6)

Historically, from this position the PDP has attempted to persuade the people that Commonwealth status represents "the best of both worlds" (PDP, 2010: 133) – the ideal combination of a fully developed Puerto Rican nationhood and a whole series of political, economic and social benefits derived from the metropolis, such as citizenship. As the party manual puts it, "[t]he People of Puerto Rico have, in the PDP, the only instrument that guarantees the permanence of Puerto Rican nationality and cultural identity and, at the same time, a relation of political association with the United States... and all this, without the need to pay US taxes" (PDP, 2010: 133). This postnationalist strategy attempts to maintain "association without assimilation and cultural distinction without complete separation" (Soto-Crespo, 2006: 734).

4.3.4 *Fear*

The above three sections have demonstrated that status is presented to the people fundamentally as a debate about nationalism, state-building and decolonisation. This section underlines that fear also forms an important part of each party's attempt to persuade the people to select its status preference. The PNP plays heavily on most Puerto Rican's fear of political separation from the United States and of losing their US citizenship. It argues that "only statehood guarantees permanent, indissoluble, irrevocable citizenship" (Academia Estadista, 2010: 4). At the same time the party looks to convince Puerto Ricans that only US citizenship has saved the island from economic and political disaster. In the words of a common party phrase circulated in newspaper advertising:

American citizenship: where would we be without it? (In Berman Santana, 1997: 1)

In this regard, the PIP blames its lack of electoral success on the "systematic indoctrination" of Puerto Ricans by the United States and the PNP, which have "foment[ed] a fear of our own freedom and a collective feeling of inferiority and impotence" (PIP, 2007: 21). Due to their colonial inferiority complex "the majority of our people have been incorrectly made to believe that Puerto Rico could not cope as an independent nation" (2007: 21).

In response to the PNP, the PDP and PIP both play upon Puerto Ricans' strong feelings of collective identity in an attempt to persuade them that under statehood they would "pay the heaviest of prices" of cultural and linguistic assimilation (Berríos Martínez, 1997: 109). However, given the PIP's weakness as a party the PDP claims to be the "only electoral force" capable of "arresting the assimilation of our people" that would take place under statehood (PDP, 2010: 76). The PDP often points out that under statehood Puerto Rico could not possibly retain the two forms of international cultural representation that it currently celebrates with pride – an Olympic team and participation in beauty contests. Given that the PNP discourse insists that Puerto Rico's nation is the

United States, Puerto Ricans would be forced to compete under the US flag as representatives of that nation if the island became its 51st state (PDP, 2010: 52). The PNP usually responds to these accusations by noting there is nothing written into the US Constitution that would legally mandate the erosion of Puerto Rican culture. I received a well-rehearsed version of this argument while interviewing the Secretary of State:

CE: Some people would say the Spanish language, the language of Puerto Rico, would be in jeopardy under statehood.

PNP: Under what legal basis? [*Immediately takes a copy of the US Constitution out of pocket and slams it down on the table*]

I always carry the Constitution, and let's see what the Constitution says about that. You look throughout the Constitution, you will never find... any part of the Constitution that says that the Federal Government or Congress establishes the official language of the nation. It's nowhere to be found.

This response demonstrates the importance that the PNP leadership assigns to the institutions of the United States in considerations of Puerto Rican identity. Specifically, the US Constitution forms the lens through which it is understood. The Secretary of State also clearly attempts to reduce statehood - a status that would raise intractable cultural issues - to a merely legal question (Pabón, 2007: 68).

4.4 'Breaking into' status

This section attempts to deconstruct, or in Peet's (2007: 25) words "break into", the status discourse as it is framed by the political elites. Deconstruction involves taking a discourse "more seriously than its exponents" in order to "trac[e] its leading themes to their interest base" (2007: 25-6). This is attempted by discussing the responses of central politicians to some of my more pressing questions about the status question and their relationship to it. As Peet (2007: 26) puts it, when analysing hegemony "the vital question is to get

to the essence behind the various appearances or disguises assumed by policies". Hegemony is about the "concealment of interests" (Urry, 1981; in Jackson, 1989: 51) - advancing ideological agendas and trying to hide them at the same time. The public positions on status, as outlined by the elites above, to a certain extent attempt to conceal particular agendas that are not related to the stated goal of decolonising the 'people' (Pabón, 2007: 68).

4.4.1 *What else defines the parties?*

The status question is so dominant in Puerto Rican politics that the parties do not appear to have coherent or consistent policies beyond a status position. This was established by asking interviewees to explain what political beliefs all members of their party had in common beyond supporting statehood, independence or Commonwealth. The vagueness with which most elites responded, the confusion of others, and the generic repetitions of status positions, would suggest that the political elites have naturalised their own framework for political discourse. As such the status question would appear to have blocked the formulation and consideration of other clear policies and positions:

CE: Aside from your position on status, what political views define and unify your party?

PIP: We are the party of social justice.

PNP: We believe in social justice.

PNP: We believe in the US system and US democratic values, and in making full use of federal funds.

PDP: What unites us right now is that we want to rescue the country, to take it off the worst route.

PDP: We believe in our culture, that we are Puerto Ricans, but we also want US citizenship.

Some of the elites were reflexively aware that the parties are ideologically diverse in the sense that each organisation consists of members

who span the left-right ideological spectrum (Cámara-Fuertes, 2009: 14). As a member of the PDP put it:

In Puerto Rico, You do not associate politically based on your socio-economic ideology. You vote, you associate politically, based on your political status preference. So if you're a statehooder, you're... in the statehood party, if you're a Commonwealther, you're in the Commonwealth party, and if you're an *independentista* you're in the independence party. And within those parties you will have a full panoply of people who go everywhere from the left to the right. (PDP interviewee)

Given this situation, the incumbent Resident Commissioner candidly admitted that the policies of the PNP and PDP are on paper essentially the same as they gravitate towards moderate positions:

We're split along status. If you look at the platforms of the two main political parties in Puerto Rico, you see that 80% of those platforms is the same. So the parties are pretty moderate. You'll find some distinctions, but not major distinctions. Except in the status area. It sounds like it shouldn't happen, but it happens because of status! (Resident Commissioner, PNP)

For example, the ideological ambiguity of the PNP is exposed by the reality that its leadership is divided between supporting the United States' Democratic Party and Republican Party. Some are members of the former, while others belong to the latter. In the context of pro-statehood discourse, those leaders who are Republicans would appear to occupy a contradictory ideological position. While the PNP discourse holds that statehood would result in a bonanza of federal funds, the mainland Republican discourse seeks to cut, not extend, public spending. As a PDP leader put it to me:

Right now we have a problem with the PNP. The governor [Luis Fortuño] is on the right-right. To the point that he has one discourse here and another over there. I'll give you an example. Obama's healthcare reform. It assigns us millions of dollars. So the governor came and launched the program *Mi Salud*, using funds from over there. But he belongs to the Republican Party that wants to eliminate [laughs] Obama's healthcare reform. If

they succeed, our program goes. How is it possible to support what you want to eliminate? Tremendous. (PDP interviewee)

Rather than considering the status question to be a problematic model of political organisation for decision-making, the elites point to the existence of this self-evident structure as proof that the status question is indeed the fundamental political question that Puerto Ricans should be asking. This has the consequence of precluding Puerto Rico's political elites from seeing (and organising) politics in a different way. These points are evident in another exchange with the Secretary of State below. When I asked him about the immediate problems faced by ordinary citizens, his responses quickly drifted into the status question:

CE: What do you think people perceive are the most pressing problems in Puerto Rico?

PNP: Well, they perceive that the political status issue, that we would draw Puerto Rico closer to the United States, and that we would finally resolve the political status question. And that will not be resolved until you achieve a permanent political status that is constitutional...
[continues]

CE: Yes. But to return to.... the everyday problems of Puerto Ricans, well, what sorts of things are people concerned about on the streets today?

PNP: Well, they are concerned about immediate problems of the economy, jobs, crime, the health system, education. But most Puerto Ricans recognise that the root problem we have in Puerto Rico is political status. The fact that you define your political affiliation based on political status suggests that that truly is the base political problem that Puerto Rico has.

The responses discussed in this subsection demonstrate that the political elites are convinced that a political system structured around the status question is self-evidently necessary, despite its ideological contradictions. Therefore, not only do they attempt to persuade the masses that they should desire this framework, they have also naturalised it themselves. The Secretary of State above appears to be unaware of his own role in reproducing this

framework. Peet (2007) points out that the elites who seek to establish hegemony are often persuaded of the power of their own discourses. As he puts it: “A community of experts takes the same things for granted – indeed, that is the meaning of ‘consensus’... There are basic ideas and methods that do not have to be discussed, so debate focuses ‘productively’ on slight differences within a meaning structure that is assumed, within a set of institutions, as with government, governance and elite academic institutions” (2007: 20). This is the state of affairs in Puerto Rican politics, where the predominant ‘meaning structure’ is status, and the elites play a pivotal role in its reproduction. The relationship of this meaning structure to everyday political practice is the focus of the following chapters of the thesis.

4.4.2 Change the system or dominate the system?

This subsection considers the possibility that Puerto Rico’s political elites are more interested to dominate the existing political system than they are to change it, as per their status preferences. Here it is important to reiterate that the main institutions performing, disseminating and controlling the discourses of the status question in Puerto Rico are the political parties. In the first instance, therefore, the parties are driven by a short-term imperative to win elections and establish political control over the current system (Anderson, 1973: 7). This raises the possibility that the parties are not, in practical terms, as serious about changing or modifying Puerto Rico’s status as they claim to be in their discourse. Realistically, a party is only ever in a position to pursue the status question through practices such as organising plebiscites or lobbying US Congress once it has dominated political power in the domestic system by winning elections. Moreover, given that general election results are commonly taken as indicators of current levels of public support for the status options championed by each party (Barreto, 2000a), the parties only tend to act on status if an election has been won by a landslide majority. It is very likely that the wide margin of Luis Fortuño’s victory for the PNP in 2008 influenced the

party's decision to hold a plebiscite in 2012 at the end of his term, as they looked to capitalise on a perceived statehood advantage. Had the PNP's 2008 victory been marginal, it is unlikely that the plebiscite would have taken place.

The evidence presented below would suggest that the parties are not, in practice, as serious about the status question as their discourses would claim. Specifically, none of the parties appear to have thought carefully about what would actually happen upon the resolution of the status question according to their favoured option. The parties have not made specific or realistic plans to prepare the Puerto Rican political system (and much less their own organisations) for the arrival of a new or modified status:

CE: What preparations has the party made for the achievement of its status preference?

PNP: Well, the truth of the matter is that statehood will not happen overnight. You know, likely there will be a transition period, a couple of years to prepare for the upcoming presidential elections.

PIP: There will be an economic transition period during which the US will compensate us for colonialism.

PDP: Actually, many people in our party are more or less satisfied with the Commonwealth as it is. We might want to improve it, but we're also constantly obliged to defend what we already have against the statehooders.

These responses would indicate that the PIP is the only party with a concrete policy for realising its option. However, on further inspection this policy is not serious. The PIP proposes in its 2008 manifesto that the transition to independence would be assisted by a "Fund of the Republic", financed by the United States "in compensation for 110 years of colonialism" (PIP, 2008: 9). Such a fund would be awarded during a "reasonable transition period" of at least ten years and be equal to current Federal expenditures on the island (PIP, 2007: 28). This is completely at odds with the US Congress' insistence that all options be "revenue neutral" (Rivera Ortiz and Ramos, 2001: 8), and the Task Force's (2007: 7) more recent declaration that an independent Puerto Rico

“would not automatically be entitled to receive monetary support” from the United States. It would therefore appear that the PIP does not even consider its own status preference a realistic prospect.

The political elites essentially admit, through these statements above, that they do not expect the status question to be resolved soon. In a practical sense, therefore, their status discourses might serve primarily as devices for persuading the people to vote for them in general elections. If this is the case, the main purpose of the status question is to secure positions of power for the political elites within the existing system. Internalising their own discourses, the parties may truly believe in the virtue of status positions and the status question. However, in reality they are unable to specify at what moment in the future their preferences could ever be realised. This situation supports an interpretation that their immediate ideological interests are to dominate, and thereby reproduce, the existing system - and not necessarily to change or modify it as per their stated goals. As Anderson (1973: 8) writes, “the exigencies of electoral party politics in Puerto Rico reinforce the functional acceptance of the autonomist status quo”.

Pabón (2007: 71) provokes that “those who declare that their fundamental political goal is to resolve the island's status are the ones who most dread its resolution, because without the issue of the status they would cease to have the issue that justifies their political existence”. The fact that the parties have not seriously thought about the consequences of a definitive status resolution for their own organisations may be taken as evidence of this. Indeed, as the present and previous subsections (4.4.1) demonstrate, the status question serves to conceal both the parties' lack of forward thinking and their weak ideological foundations beyond status positions. The status question might therefore appear to be a red herring, disguising these two important realities and protecting the legitimacy of the parties and its politicians.

It may be the case that the political elites genuinely feel more motivated to change the system than to dominate the existing one. After all, two of the three main parties are adamant that Puerto Rico is a colony and passionately

argue about how this should be addressed. This said, the motivation of the elites to change the system is derived, at least in part, from their personal aspirations to occupy powerful positions within the reconfigured state apparatus. The state-centric decolonisation proposed by the parties, Grosfoguel (2008: 6) argues, merely validates the aspirations of the existing colonial elites to become “a national bourgeoisie, to be presidents and senators of the Republic or ambassadors or consuls in foreign countries.” Indeed, in interview the Resident Commissioner inadvertently betrayed his personal desire for recognition in US Congress as a fully-fledged Representative or Senator:

I’m in Washington being treated as a territory every day. My name’s not even on the electronic board in the house when I go there. That’s pretty offensive. I live through this every day.
(Resident Commissioner, PNP)

4.5 Hegemony beyond the centre: the municipalities

The section above provided a short critique of the hegemony of the status question using the perspectives of central political elites, gathered as the thesis’ pilot work. This section aims to set up the thesis’ main critique of the hegemony of the status question, which focuses on its relationship to the everyday politics of the municipalities. It discusses the features of municipal politics and explains its potential to empower local political actors to appropriate, modify, resist and even subvert centrally-defined political positions – in this case, status positions. This assumes a relational and entangled account of political power. Power is not fixed and simply possessed in a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate institutions, but exercised or performed (Allen, 2004; Sharp et al, 2000). As such, decision-makers in institutions ‘beneath’ the central state (as per a hierarchical understanding of state power) are in practice able to strategically work around or beyond it, creating varied political effects on the ground.

4.5.1 *Decentralisation and local power*

The scope and functions of the Puerto Rican municipalities are established in Puerto Rico's Autonomous Municipalities Act of 1991. Passed by the central government legislature, this law defines a municipality as “a geographic demarcation with all its wards, which has a specific name and is governed by a local government composed of a legislative power and an executive power” (OMB, 2012: 8).¹² Municipalities are legally independent from the central government but subordinated to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The Autonomous Municipalities Act recognises the economic, political, juridical and administrative autonomy of the municipalities from the central state in all matters of a local nature (OMB, 2012: 10). As such the Act establishes decentralisation as official public policy in Puerto Rico. Decentralisation is the transfer of powers from a central state to other state entities that are not hierarchically subordinated to it – in this case, the municipalities (García, 2012: 4). The chief executive of municipal government is the mayor. The mayor, as the following chapters will show, is the *cacique*, or chief, and wields absolute power over municipal government and space (Heine, 1993).

The Autonomous Municipalities Act was authored by former PDP governor Rafael Hernández Colón as a response to Puerto Rico's highly centralized form of government. A “centralist mentality” had dominated governmental thought and practice since the foundation of Commonwealth in 1952 (López Pumarejo, 1998: 20). As Hernández Colón (2006a: 29) puts it, in a centralised government “power is distant... Decision-making is far away from the people and their problems”. While the Act has done much to reverse this, Hernández Colón (2006d: 25) observes that many Puerto Rican politicians are still “prisoners of a paternalistic mentality that spells out that government must come from the centre no matter how indifferent, slow, or gridlocked that centre

¹² In this section I cite from a full English-language translation of the original Spanish-language Act, provided by Puerto Rico's Office of Management and Budget. The translated text is preserved as is and cited as OMB (2012).

may be". Municipal autonomy may be seen as an attempt to counteract the prevailing centred view of political power (Allen, 2004: 7) in Puerto Rico. It also responds to Gil's (1994: 100) call for Puerto Rican politics to "imagine... an administrative conception of power in terms of certain "places" that have to be covered, because the place of True Power, the national state, has been vacated". In other words, the municipalities open up an understanding of power as it is performed in concrete, local political contexts - a move away from the centred view of power that is assumed by the status discourse through its preoccupation with national state forms.

The Autonomous Municipalities Act recognises that the municipalities have extensive powers. Politically, the municipal residents vote for the local authorities - the mayor and a group of legislators - every four years. Administratively, municipalities have legislative and executive powers to manage local resources, to plan and regulate municipal territory, and to undergo construction. They can also assume responsibilities for waste disposal, local public transport, public housing, and local enforcement. Legally, the municipalities have jurisdiction over municipal territory and municipal affairs. As stated in the Act, "[e]ach municipality has legal capacity, independent and separate from the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, with perpetual succession and legislative, administrative and fiscal capacity in all matters of a municipal nature." (OMB, 2012: 10). Laws passed by the municipal legislature cannot be revoked by central government. Economically, the municipalities enjoy many freedoms, such as collecting taxes, budget management, investing on international markets, and entering into contracts with any public or private sector entity (OMB, 2012: 189).

4.5.2 Autonomy and degrees of power

While the Act allows the municipalities to have significant autonomy from central government, these powers must be claimed. The first step is to submit a Territorial Plan – a local land use master plan – to the central state

Planning Board. Once approved, the Territorial Plan grants the municipality the faculty to organise its urban space (Portillo and Rabell, 1995: 32).

Municipalities may then claim responsibilities on a five-category scale from least to greatest autonomy. A municipality with Category V autonomy has the authority to undergo any construction without intervention from the central government (OMB, 2012: 176). Conversely, Category I autonomy only grants permission for small projects, which must be approved centrally. Municipalities that do not have a Territorial Plan are not autonomous and depend on the central government to provide most services and functions.

In essence, the political power of the mayor increases with the degree of autonomy that his or her municipality enjoys. The more autonomous the municipality, the greater the mayor's capacity to make decisions independently of the central government. This opens up the possibility for mayors to modify, resist or even influence central positions and policies, as well as simply reflect or reproduce them. Local powers of autonomy are boosted further in Puerto Rico's cities. Under federal law a city or municipality with a population greater than 50,000 may procure funds directly from federal government agencies, bypassing the central government entirely.¹³ Guaynabo and Caguas are two such cities. Conversely, municipalities with low autonomy, such as Lares, are more dependent on central government, and by extrapolation, more likely to be subservient to central positions and policies. In sum, the extensive decentralisation of power to the municipalities opens up the possibility that the mayors - the *local* political elites - could exercise power in ways that reflect, modify or even resist the positions and policies of the centre, as set by the government or party leadership. The next chapter shows that these exercises of power have material consequences for the status question and its hegemony.

¹³ To clarify, this freedom is granted under US federal law and is unrelated to Puerto Rico's Autonomous Municipalities Act. Regardless, it has the effect of deepening the fiscal autonomy of Puerto Rican cities from central government.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter was inspired by the concept of hegemony to demonstrate the powers of persuasion underlying the discourses of Puerto Rico's status question. It attempted to reveal that the central political elites in the three main parties grant the status question hegemony in order to secure control over Puerto Rico's current political system. Further, the discourses of status, as circulated by the political elites, attempt to protect the legitimacy of the parties by concealing their internal ideological contradictions and lack of future planning for a definitive status resolution. Ironically, therefore, the elites use their stated wishes to change the system as discursive devices to dominate, and thereby reproduce, the *existing* system - and not necessarily to change it as per their status preferences. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the political elites are not as serious about status as the discourses they circulate would have the people believe. However, they would appear to be persuaded nonetheless of the power of their own discourses, making status hegemonic even from an elite's perspective. This is evident by the inability of politicians to clearly identify other political views that unite all members of their party. The last part of the chapter highlighted that the decentralisation of political power to municipal governments presents possibilities for a further critique of the dominance of the status question, from the local scale. Namely, the performance of local state power contains the potential to reinforce, modify, resist or subvert centrally prescribed status positions. This critique is developed in the following two chapters.

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5 Inscriptions of hegemony in space: status positions in the municipalities

5.1 Introduction

Having established that the status question is structurally dominant in Puerto Rican politics, the thesis now turns to an examination of the relationship between this dominance and everyday politics in Puerto Rico. To consider where and how status positions are manifested in everyday politics, the chapter presents three case study sites. Each demonstrates the material representation of status positions in municipal territory. Specifically, party political discourses around the status question are expressed through complementary practices of municipal identity construction and public works associated with the built environment. These actions are the result of decisions made by the ruling political elites in the municipal governments at each case study site. As such, they represent concrete examples of how positions on status have informed political decisions on Puerto Rico. While the dominant geographical frameworks for understanding the status question are the nation, state and nation-state, these insights demonstrate that Puerto Rican questions about nationalism and state building also have local significance and material effects.

The first section of the chapter outlines the adopted theoretical approach. Specifically, local political elites have implemented material changes to the everyday, lived environment of the municipalities in order to bring into being and normalise discourses of Puerto Rican identity that are consistent with their status positions. In a performative way, these elites attempt to inscribe hegemony through landscape. The second section presents a background to the construction of Puerto Rican identities in place. The third, fourth and fifth sections discuss the case studies of *Guaynabo City* (representing statehood), Caguas, *Nuestro Nuevo País* (Commonwealth) and Lares, *Ciudad del Grito* (independence). The chapter draws upon interviews with the local political elites and documents collected from each municipal site. The mayors are the key interviewees as the *caciques* ('chieftains') (Heine, 1993) of local political

power. Supporting evidence is provided by other local elites: municipal legislators from all parties, and directors of the mayor's executive departments.

5.2 Performing hegemony in landscape

Theoretically, the chapter considers that local political elites have implemented material changes to the everyday, lived environment of the municipalities in order to bring into being and normalise discourses of Puerto Rican identity that are consistent with their status positions. The inscriptions of hegemonic status discourses in material space attempt to performatively realign identities, since “the repeated inscription of norms, and the continual experience of these norms, permit the emergence of a stable ego” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 412). These processes deepen an understanding of status as not a predetermined aspect of Puerto Rican reality but rather constitutive of hegemonic discourses that are routinely performed and brought into being through material spaces. Such inscriptions feed back into the production of the landscapes of Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares (Gregson and Rose, 2000). As outlined in section 2.2.1, the thesis considers the municipalities to be “peripheral centres of power” capable of producing sub-hegemonic effects (Peet, 2007: 22). Peripheral centres of power “translate received discourses, modify and add to ideas, and provide evidence of their validity through regional practice” (2007: 22). The case studies presented here demonstrate how local political elites exercise their powers over municipal space to appropriate, modify and validate centrally prescribed status positions.

The chapter contributes to theoretical understandings of the workings of hegemony in landscape. Landscapes, understood as ‘texts’, are “transformations of ideologies into concrete form” (Duncan and Duncan, 1988: 117). The built environment in the municipalities of Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares shall be read as such, with the ideologies in question relating to status positions. Landscapes are socially constructed by those that wield the “power of definition” (Western, 1981; in Anderson, 1987: 51) - in this case, the Puerto Rican mayors. Moreover,

as Daniels and Cosgrove (1988: 7) put it, landscapes are “duplicitous” as they have the capacity to appear objective and ‘natural’ while concealing their ideological foundations. They should therefore be distrusted as “pernicious delusions” and “dazzling tricks” (1988: 7). This chapter reflects that the actions of the mayors in the municipalities regarding landscape do little to conceal their ideological intentions; rather, they may be read as performed attempts to display and promote them. Indeed, the mayors aim to give their ideological intentions – specifically, their status positions – legitimacy by inscribing them in space. In sum, landscapes “not only reflect and articulate ideologies and social relations, they actively institutionalise and legitimise them by reifying them in concrete form” (Winchester et al, 2003: 67).

Place naming is an important aspect of hegemony in landscape, and of particular relevance to the case studies. Tuan (1991: 684) notes that language plays an active role in the creation of place: “Words alone... can have the power to render objects, formerly invisible because unattended, visible, and impart to them a certain character”. Place naming “plays a key role in the social construction of space and the contested processes of attaching meaning to places” (Alderman, 2008: 196). Notably, it has a “capacity for changing and challenging lines of identity” (2008: 196). In this vein, the case studies explore how decisions on local place-naming and identity – specifically, municipal slogans - both cement and challenge the lines of identity set by status discourses.

5.3 Background: the inscription of Puerto Rican identities in space

On both the island and US mainland, symbols of Puerto Rican identity have been materially represented in place. In Chicago, two huge roadside structures in the form of the Puerto Rican flag mark the start and finish of the *Paseo Boricua* (Puerto Rican Pathway), demarcating the boundaries of the city's Puerto Rican district and claiming “a recognisable economic, political and cultural space for Puerto Ricans” (Flores-González, 2001: 9). Similarly, the *casitas* of New York – small wooden houses reminiscent of rural Puerto Rico built on derelict inner city land appropriated by diasporic communities – are

"act[s] of reterritorialisation... imparting identity to the urban landscape" (Aponte-Parés, 1995: 14). While there are a number of studies about the representations and performances of Puerto Rican space by popular groups in the United States, much less has been written about politically motivated appropriations of space by elite groups on the island.

In Puerto Rico, the central government has sanctioned some of the most notable monuments to Puerto Rican identity. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that these works often reflect party political positions on the subject – which are in turn related to status positions (Morris, 1995). For example, the famous *Monumento al Jíbaro* in Salinas commemorates the white *jíbaro* peasant farmer, a symbol of the PDP and its achievements in alleviating rural poverty under Commonwealth status. Unveiled in 1976 by former governor Rafael Hernández Colón, the monument proclaims the *jíbaro* "the cultivator of our land, genesis of our race, and authentic Puerto Rican expression" (Field notes: 2/15/10). Since the PDP had constructed the *jíbaro* as an icon of national identity, and claimed to represent its interests, the party "in effect claimed to represent the interests of Puerto Rico" (Córdova, 2005: 180). In this way the PDP has sought legitimacy for its policies - including the foundation of Commonwealth - through the construction and material expression of national symbols.

Similarly, in 2010 the incumbent pro-statehood administration constructed the *Paseo de los Presidentes* (Walkway of the Presidents) at the foot of the *Capitolio*, the central government legislature in San Juan. Jointly unveiled by the leaders of the upper and lower houses, the Walkway presents statues to the seven US presidents that have set foot on the island (Figure 5.1). As the commemorative plaque reveals, it serves to foster a sense of closeness between Puerto Rico and the United States, with the people of the former subsumed within the nation of the latter. This represents the hegemonic pro-statehood discourse:

The statues that represent them were deliberately commissioned and made to highlight the figure of each president as a citizen called upon by our Nation to serve an individual [sic], as persons

[sic], whose human side seems to beckon us to come closer. Therefore we see only their figures without pedestals nor ornaments, as they seem to walk up to meet us, the people of Puerto Rico, at the house of laws. (Field notes: 15/1/11)



Figure 5.1: Gerald Ford at the *Paseo de los Presidentes*. A vacant site for a future statue lies in the background. (Field photo)

When I visited the *Paseo* in early 2011, extra spaces for further statues had already been prepared in eager anticipation of future presidential visits. An Obama statue has since been added to mark the president's visit to the island on 14 June, 2011 - even though the event itself was regarded as a diplomatic failure for the pro-statehood administration.¹⁴ Nonetheless, while unveiling the Obama statue during President's Day on 20 February 2012, Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi seized the opportunity to perform the statehood argument. He decried the "irony" that "the US president is an important figure for Puerto Ricans, despite the fact that we cannot elect him", and insisted "Puerto Rico and its near four million US citizens deserve to enjoy all the benefits and responsibilities of our fellow citizens" (*Primera Hora*, 2012).

On the municipal level, governments of Puerto Rican towns and cities have a strong tradition of using slogans to commemorate multiple aspects of local and national Puerto Rican culture. Many of these find expression in murals

¹⁴ Relations between the PNP and President Obama were reportedly sour, with the party failing to interest him in backing a federally sanctioned plebiscite (*El Nuevo Día*, 2011).

and signage, both within urban centres and along the territorial borders with neighbouring municipalities. Slogans celebrate, for example, a municipality's historic agricultural production (*Pueblo del Tomate* – 'Town of the Tomato'), the raising of internationally successful beauty pageant contestants (*Pueblo de Mujeres Hermosas* – 'Town of Beautiful Women'), and even light-hearted rivalries with other municipalities (*Ponce es Ponce, lo demás es parking* – 'Ponce is Ponce, everywhere else is just parking space') (Field notes: 6/11/10).

This tendency towards local identification and place-naming has been facilitated by the political process of *municipalización* (municipalisation), which has been in effect since the Autonomous Municipalities Act was passed in 1991. *Municipalización* refers to the gradual decentralisation of state powers from central to local government (Hernández Colón, 2006a). As section 4.5.1 indicated, such political change has enabled municipal actors to exert increased control over their public works with minimal interference from the central state. In particular, place naming is made possible by the powers of the mayors under the Autonomous Municipalities Act to "name the streets, avenues, walks, parks, plazas, alleys, pedestrian walks, buildings, facilities and all kinds of municipal public highways, works, structures or facilities" (OMB, 2012: 22):

The mayor shall determine the corresponding name, which shall be approved through a municipal ordinance to such effects... The municipality shall, to the extent possible, choose names related to the municipal history, geography, and traditions or of distinguished persons of the past identified with the municipality. (2012: 22)

The Puerto Rican press often considers the growing presence of municipal slogans in signage and monuments to be apolitical marketing exercises spearheaded by local political elites in order to promote the town. As Caquías Cruz (2010: 15) writes in *El Nuevo Día*: "Caguas started to market itself a few years back as 'Our New Country'. And suddenly Guaynabo turned into Guaynabo City... The mayors distinguish themselves with new slogans". However, it is argued below that the slogans of Guaynabo, Caguas, and Lares (Figure 5.2) are not apolitical gestures; rather, they likely express the mayors'

perspectives on the status question. Indeed, the material manifestation of status at these sites reveals that the question itself has become an important aspect of Puerto Rican identity (Laó-Montes, 2008), finding expression through public works just as any other aspect of national culture.

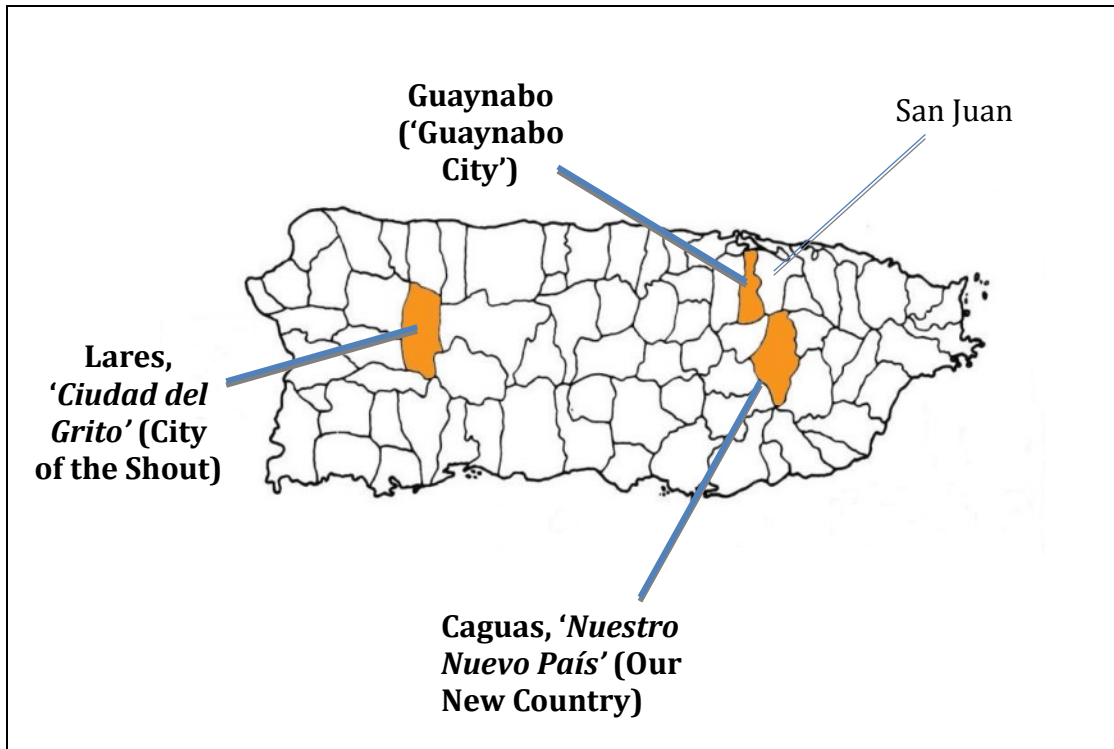


Figure 5.2: Location of municipal research sites [recap]. (Source: author)

5.4 Guaynabo City

The municipality of Guaynabo is located immediately to the west of San Juan (Figure 5.2), with which it shares a municipal border, and has a current population of 97,924 (US Census Bureau, 2012a: 30). Once a rural area, Guaynabo has developed over the past 20 years into a predominantly residential municipality servicing the entire San Juan Metropolitan Area, of which it now forms part. Its several prestigious gated communities house an upper-income population of urban professionals working in commerce, services and the central government, including the “top elites related to American

business” (Duchesne Winter, 2008: 13). As such Guaynabo currently enjoys the highest per-capita income of all municipalities in Puerto Rico (Suárez Carrasquillo, 2009: 48) and contains the highest concentration of English speakers (Pousada, 2008: 138). Duchesne Winter (2008: 13) even asserts that the “denizens of the Guaynabo City enclave... conscientiously pursue miscegenation-assimilation through mixed marriages with Anglo-Americans”. Residents of Guaynabo are often called *guaynabitos* in everyday Puerto Rican talk – a pejorative term literally meaning ‘little people from Guaynabo’. It was coined in the 1990s to refer to an identifiable cohort of young professionals who worked in the pro-statehood administration of former governor Pedro Rosselló and resided in the gated communities of Guaynabo (Interview, PIP legislator, Guaynabo).

Guaynabo is an electoral stronghold of the pro-statehood PNP. Its population has voted for the PNP and statehood in every single gubernatorial election, mayoral election and status plebiscite since the foundation of the party in 1967 (Álvarez-Rivera, 2013). Its long-standing mayor, Héctor O’Neill, is currently serving a historic sixth consecutive term in office, having assumed the position in 1993. What distinguishes Guaynabo from other pro-statehood municipalities is its unmistakable municipal slogan, ‘Guaynabo City’, and its complementary display of the English language throughout the built environment. Basic road signage in and around the town square is not in Spanish but rather English: ‘DO NOT ENTER’, ‘ONE WAY’, ‘TWO WAY’, ‘YIELD’, ‘STOP’. *Calle de José de Diego* becomes ‘Jose de Diego Street’ through the anglicisation of street names (Figure 5.3). Middle-class residential streets are lined with US MAIL postboxes and picket fences. Main roads and highways intersecting the municipal boundary are decorated with large signs that mark the ‘Guaynabo CITY LIMIT’. ‘GUAYNABO CITY POLICE’ cars patrol the municipality. In all of these ways, local affinity with the United States is performatively asserted in the material landscape.



Figure 5.3: Jose de Diego St, Guaynabo City. (Field photo)

The following discussion argues that Mayor O'Neill's 'Guaynabo City' is a sub-hegemonic performance of status discourse. Guaynabo City is not only a material representation of O'Neill's pro-statehood status position. More specifically, it brings into being a reworked version of the standard statehood discourse set centrally by the PNP. Guaynabo City could therefore be considered sub-hegemonic in that it significantly modifies one aspect of that central discourse. Section 4.3.4 of the last chapter discussed that the PNP are adamant Puerto Rico's culture, language and identity would be safeguarded under statehood. However, Guaynabo City would appear to reverse this emphasis by actively promoting statehood as the promise of Americanisation and cultural assimilation. Guaynabo, as a 'peripheral power centre', therefore produces sub-hegemony in that it "basically supports, while modifying, the ideological positions taken by central institutions" (Peet, 2007: 22).

Guaynabo City speaks to one of the most fundamental issues in the status debate: namely, the prospect of Puerto Rico's cultural assimilation into the United States if it were to become the 51st state. In particular, the deployment of English in Guaynabo City highlights the complex relationship between the English language and the Puerto Rican status question. As Pousada (1999: 33)

puts it, “fostering English is linked in the minds of many Puerto Ricans with assimilationism, while defending Spanish is the hallmark of nationalism”. Indeed, in Puerto Rico language is intertwined with debates on cultural identity and “authentic Puerto Ricanness” (Lazú and Negrón, 2000: 118), such that those who speak ‘corrupted’ Spanglish, or even speak English better than Spanish, are considered less Puerto Rican or ‘Nuyorican’. However, since English is also an important vessel for connecting Puerto Ricans to the United States and the rest of the world, it is understood in ambiguous terms as “both a tool of liberation and instrument of oppression” (Pousada, 1999: 33). At the same time, learning English is deemed a challenge for Puerto Ricans, with the language earning the nickname *el difícil* (‘the difficult one’) “for its reputation as being difficult to learn even after years of formal study in school” (Mazak, 2008: 52).

Pro-independence writers have derided Guaynabo City as a gesture of *pitiyanquismo* – shameless pandering to the United States through attempts to show Puerto Rico’s cultural compatibility with that nation. As Pesquera Sevillano (2009: 38) puts it, Guaynabo City is “a sad spectacle of transculturation”. Historically, these groups understand that the use of English in Puerto Rico contributes to the “erosion of the language unity of the Puerto Rican people” and “can only favour a certain political solution to our status question” (Tapia Flores, 1979; in Pousada, 2008: 147). However, the great irony of Guaynabo City, as Noriega (2012: 1) highlights, is that neither the mayor nor the majority of his municipal employees speak English:

The mayor of Guaynabo City cannot offer his annual budget message in the English language. If he could, most of his municipal legislators wouldn’t understand him. Neither can the principal supervisors of the municipality give orders to their subordinates in English. If the municipal officials are summoned to the federal Tribunal as defendants or witnesses, they would have to ask for translators.¹⁵ (Noriega, 2012: 1)

¹⁵ One of the curiosities of the Puerto Rican justice system is that the federal District Courts, the courts of highest authority on the island, must conduct all proceedings in English. This is a situation that Pousada (2008: 137) calls “linguistic imperialism”.

I asked O'Neill how the concept of Guaynabo City originated. He explained that it was inspired by a trip to the United States in 1997:

<Laughs> That came about as a result of an order I gave. When I arrived here I had one hundred cadets in the municipal police force. I purchased forty patrol vehicles and wanted a distinctive design, different from the rest. And I'm in Chicago, I see Chicago's patrol vehicles, and I start to take photos... When I returned to Guaynabo I called up a graphic designer who had done some work in the municipality, I sent him the photos and told him: 'I want you to put the municipal vehicles exactly like that'. The designer got to work, and he put them exactly like that: just as the photo said 'Chicago City', so he put 'Guaynabo City' on all the vehicles. I said, 'gosh, look what he's done!' [Interview, Mayor, Guaynabo]

As US citizens Puerto Ricans circulate freely between two spaces - the colony and the metropolis – and in the process overcome traditional barriers associated with borders. Revolving-door migration, argues Aponte-Parés (1995: 15), “has provided several generations ongoing contact with ‘fresh’ images of the *otra patria*, the ‘other country or homeland’, providing fluidity in exchanging people as well as culture and images”. In this way Guaynabo City was created, O'Neill having returned to Puerto Rico with refreshed cultural and linguistic referents in the form of his images of Chicago, soon to find material expression in his jurisdiction. Owing to the instant popularity of the ‘Guaynabo City Police’ design within the municipality (Figure 5.4), O'Neill's Department of Public works extended the Guaynabo City slogan to signage, and later oversaw the replacement of Spanish-language instructions for traffic with English-language equivalents around the town centre (Figure 5.3 above). Indeed, as Gomez-Pena (1993; in Aponte-Parés, 1995: 16) notes, travel to the metropolis is a “journey [that] goes not only from South to North, [but] from Spanish to English”.



Figure 5.4: Guaynabo City Police patrol car. (Source: Rexach, 2008)

I asked O'Neill why he implemented these changes. He responded: "Wherever you live in Puerto Rico, people feel pride for being from that place. People from Caguas say, 'I'm from the Creole City'. Or the Cowboys of Bayamon. But here there wasn't a phrase for the pride of the *Guaynabeño*.¹⁶ That's why I gave them Guaynabo City, to be able to say 'I'm from Guaynabo City', to feel proud". O'Neill notes in his published biography that Guaynabo's residents have indeed embraced the label. "Now everyone feels a great pride in declaring that they are from 'Guaynabo City', a pride as profound as that which our friends from the Pearl of the South feel when they say 'Ponce is Ponce'" (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 142).

Understanding that the source of inspiration for a slogan of local pride is the United States, and knowing that Guaynabo is a stronghold of the pro-statehood party, I asked the mayor about his views on the status question. His responses reflected the PNP's hegemonic discourses on economic dependency, citizenship and nation:

CE: Could you explain to me why statehood represents the best future for Puerto Rico?

¹⁶ Denonym for the residents of Guaynabo.

HON: Look. You have to see it, not as a question of the future. It's a question of how Puerto Rico has developed... The roads were constructed with federal funds, the maintenance of roads, the social aspect of *cupones* [welfare cheques] and health, all that, fifty percent comes from federal funds. Within that situation, we can continue to receive.

...We have the problem that the moment has arrived, that we don't have gold, we don't have agriculture, we don't have anything. What do we have? A powerful American citizenship. It [statehood] is our destiny...

...We already have ourselves placed in the United States with both feet. So what do we have the responsibility to do? Well, walk with our own feet. Inside the American nation.

This above dialogue reveals how the hegemonic pro-statehood discourse importantly cements an asymmetric economic and political power relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. However, deviating from the hegemonic statehood position, O'Neill believes that this asymmetry also extends to the cultural. He revealed this when I asked him to elaborate on the meaning of 'American nation':

CE: Your nation is the United States.

HON: Correct.

CE: Do you not feel that your nation is Puerto Rico?

HON: Well, Puerto Rico is not a nation. It is a territory. If it were a nation, it would be a totally independent country... Nation is your ability to face other powers. What can we face other powers with?... Puerto Rico is such a small country. Compare it with Costa Rica, with Guatemala, with Panama. We don't have the problems they have there. Here there is food! Over there, poverty! Guatemala isn't a power because it doesn't have resources. It's a republic. Honduras neither. These countries lack their own personality. Why do they [Puerto Rican independence supporters] want to be like them? Just to be able to say, "I'm from Puerto Rico?"

CE: But I'd imagine that you feel proud to be Puerto Rican.

HON: OK. It's just like the Texan. Or someone from the Tennessee mountains. They are all proud of their country. And each one of their state. I feel Puerto Rican, I was born on this land, and I feel proud of everything that I have. OK? But, of everything I have, someone has to have given it to me. It has always been like that. They [the states of the Union] have it too.

The above dialogue reveals that O'Neill's positions on status are both hegemonic and sub-hegemonic. His understanding of 'Puerto Rican' as a cultural identity subsumed within the American nation accurately reproduces the hegemonic PNP position on Puerto Rican culture. However, his specific comments about the relationship between Puerto Rican culture and United States national culture should be considered sub-hegemonic in that they diverge significantly from the party line. The centre emphasises the resilience and uniqueness of Puerto Rican identity and attempts to persuade that it would endure and even flourish under statehood (Meléndez, 1991: 136). However, O'Neill places an opposite emphasis on Puerto Ricanness, suggesting above that everything that he 'has' as a Puerto Rican – in other words, the attributes that ascribe him an identity – have been given to him by the United States. This is essentially a cultural assimilationist position.

It could therefore be argued that Guaynabo City is a performance of local state power intended to legitimise the cultural assimilation of Puerto Ricans through everyday municipal landscape. For example, the mayor stated that the purpose of the English-language signage is to reproduce the transportation infrastructure of the mainland: "more or less, it's to familiarise you in terms of the traffic system in English... When you go to visit a country, to visit a city in the United States, it's so that you are already oriented". When I asked O'Neill directly if Guaynabo City was related to his pro-statehood views, he strongly denied the suggestion: "no, the one has nothing to do with the other". However, during discussion of the *guaynabito*, the stereotypical municipal resident, O'Neill inadvertently revealed that Guaynabo City is indeed his attempt to reproduce aspects of statehood in a Puerto Rican town:

HON: The definition of a *guaynabito* is the following: a citizen that, unfortunately, lives under a status which he says is a colony, and enjoys all the benefits of a state, here in Guaynabo City. They [pro-independence supporters] say we are a colony, but they live here. They come from elsewhere! And they enjoy all the benefits that the United States have. Clean streets, good services.

CE: I thought *guaynabito* referred to someone from one of the prosperous areas.

HON: Exactly, an individual who very easily could move to the United States, who is rich, but he stays here. He doesn't move from Guaynabo. Why? Because here are all the benefits, all the facilities for communities, as if it were a state.

Flores (2000: 73) writes that the building of *casitas* in New York is an “act of imaginative transposition” and a “constructed illusion... a performative sense of vividly imagined place and time: it is ‘as if’ we were in Puerto Rico or Puerto Rico were here”. Likewise, Guaynabo City may be read as O’Neill’s performatively ‘constructed illusion’ of statehood – all the benefits, all the facilities, ‘as if’ we were in a state. Similarly, Aponte-Parés (1995: 17) notes that *casitas* grant Puerto Ricans the “power of place and culture”, creating important spaces of belonging “in a city that has yet to offer many of them acceptance”. In the same way Guaynabo City might also create for statehood supporters an imagined sense of acceptance by the United States that remains elusive in reality, given the numerous failed bids for statehood through formal political channels.

In the above passage O’Neill reveals that Guaynabo City is about providing residents with a quality of life and public services that he perceives as equivalent to the offerings of any state of the union. Indeed, he suspects that the real *guaynabitos* are not statehooders but in fact *independentistas*, who hypocritically reside in his municipality while enjoying the advantages of the statehood that he has brought into being. O’Neill therefore appears to suggest that his pro-statehood beliefs have influenced not only his municipal slogan but also his governance as mayor. To be sure, Guaynabo is renowned in Puerto Rico

for its provision of excellent local services to residents, including bi-weekly rubbish collection, mandatory recycling, and high quality social housing (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 103). It is likely that O'Neill's proven track record as a local political actor gives legitimacy to the Guaynabo City landscape. However, the mayor strongly hints above that his provision of such services is entangled with his desire for statehood. This "entanglement of power" (Sharp et al, 2000: 12) – the way in which he exercises power in ways that simultaneously connect to local concerns and central hegemonic positions – is discussed further in the following chapter.

O'Neill argues that the primary purpose of the municipal signage is to inspire the learning of English. In the interview he noted he was "educating children", "valuing language", and "developing Guaynabo as a tourist destination". Attempting to get beneath this, I politely asked him to again consider whether his pro-statehood views might have informed his decision:

CE: Let's imagine, if this is possible – if you were not a statehooder, do you think you would have put these signs in English?

HON: Of course! I could be an *independentista* and put them in English. Rubén Berríos [leader of the PIP], when he goes to [US] Congress, does he speak in Spanish? No, he speaks in English. And where do their children study? The United States! Why? To be able to move on up. But my new assistant, from the Guaynabo countryside, doesn't have the right to learn because he doesn't have the economic resources to go where Leader Rubén went... So, the government has to offer him that alternative. That's what we're talking about.

Here the mayor indicates that his administration attempts to offer Puerto Ricans 'alternative' everyday exposure to the English language through signage – possibly a response to the inadequacies of the domestic public education system in teaching it (Barreto, 2000b: 14). With reference to PIP leader Rubén Berríos, he explains that the signs are for Puerto Ricans who lack the elite privilege to travel to the United States and learn there. Further, noting the actions of Berríos in US Congress, he acknowledges that learning and speaking

English are also fundamental to enable political dialogue with the United States – specifically, to talk about the status question. Indeed, in the United States “Spanish continues to be identified as the language of a disempowered minority while English maintains the status as the dominant language that provides political, economic and social access” (Lazú and Negrón, 2000: 121).

The positions of Guaynabo’s minority legislators would support an interpretation that Guaynabo City is a sub-hegemonic attempt at cultural assimilation. In their view, the fact that the new signage is monolingual rather than bilingual (in English only, not in both English and Spanish) invalidates the mayor’s argument that Puerto Ricans can use the signs to learn English. Therefore, Guaynabo City can only represent the mayor’s attempt to culturally assimilate the town into the United States by mimicking the language and urban designs of empire. Indeed, in recent years the PDP’s rival candidates for mayor have attempted, unsuccessfully, to contest this by campaigning to remove all English-language signs and reinstall Spanish versions (Field notes: 23/4/11). The PDP legislator for Guaynabo notes bluntly that English should be learnt through “education not street signs”. The pro-independence legislator believes that the mayor’s installation of English-language signs, coupled with his own inability to speak the language, represents a “colonial contradiction”:

I don’t know if you know, but independence supporters in Puerto Rico, as a group, speak the best English. And the statehooders are those who speak the worst English. That’s a contradiction – because they want to be Americans, *American way of life*¹⁷, and we want to separate. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

This statement reflects one of the ironies of Puerto Rican status politics – that independence supporters tend to speak better English than statehood supporters, possibly due to their higher levels of education as a group (Cámara-Fuertes and Rosas-Cintrón, 2004: 170). In sum, for the PIP and PDP legislators Guaynabo City stands as a warning of the cultural assimilation that the entire island could suffer as a state. This view is founded on the cultural nationalist

¹⁷ ‘American way of life’ was spoken in English and has been italicised to reflect the change of language during the Spanish-language conversation.

assumption that the Spanish language is a deeply rooted aspect of Puerto Rican identity (Carroll, 2008: 99). As such, the prevailing construction of an anglicised Guaynabo amounts to a negation of Puerto Ricanness. Consider, for example, the following statements:

[Guaynabo City] appears to be nonsense. I say 'appears to be', because for me it isn't. It's totally the opposite of what I'm saying Guaynabo is for me. It's how to aspire to not be Guaynabo. Because this is not Guaynabo City – it's Guaynabo. Guaynabo City is there in the United States. So, he wants to be that, despite not being it. It's like wanting to be what I am not. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

The streets all in English. That's an ideological concept, that he has, to cast aside the things of ours of a population with Spanish roots, in order to bring us ideologically closer to the United States. But you can't be what you are not. You have to be you. Understand? We are a latino country. Our culture is totally latino. The language, the customs, the religion, all the potential we have as a people. (PDP legislator, Guaynabo)

The president of the majority PNP legislators defended the mayor against such criticisms by arguing that Guaynabo's street signs are symbolic of the municipality's local struggle to promote English, often against the wishes of central government. When the PDP are in power, he notes, Spanish is favoured over English in both educational policy and lawmaking, to the detriment of English. In advancing this argument, he alludes to the Official Language Act of 1991, passed by Rafael Hernández Colón's administration to make Spanish the sole official language of Puerto Rico¹⁸. Guaynabo City therefore reflects the wider struggles between the PNP and PDP to secure hegemony for their status discourses:

If the PDP is governing, then Spanish is taught. English is taken away. Or they don't take it away; it's taught without priority. The official language changes every time the government changes. If the PDP wins, they pass a law saying the official language is Spanish. If the PNP wins, more emphasis is given to English, and

¹⁸ The PNP quickly repealed the law upon returning to power two years later, restoring English alongside Spanish as a coequal official language.

the contracting of English teachers for all public schools. (PNP Legislator, Guaynabo]

If the changes to Guaynabo's built environment are supposed to teach Puerto Ricans English, they would be reminiscent of the United States' official colonial policy of 'Americanisation' on the island during the first half of the twentieth century (Negrón de Montilla, 1990). English was enforced as the sole language of classroom instruction for five decades, with US policymakers considering the Spanish language "one of the things 'wrong' with Puerto Ricans", and the learning of English a sign of loyalty and patriotism (Barreto, 2000b: 5). Indeed, from the American perspective the "Puerto Rican problem" had long consisted of assimilating Puerto Ricans as Spanish speakers into the English-speaking mainstream (López, 2007: 61). However, the policy was ultimately abandoned and regarded a failure once consensus had formed that Puerto Ricans were unable to assimilate into the American mainstream due to insuperable cultural and linguistic difference (Negrón de Montilla, 1990: 256). Guaynabo City is unique in that it represents perhaps the first instance of a self-imposed Americanisation of Puerto Rican public space, enacted by a local political elite rather than the external metropolitan power. Given that performances are always 'citational' – that is, embedded historically in past discourses and utterances (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 433) – the actions to promote English in Guaynabo City could be rooted in past colonial policies with similar aims.

To summarise the section, desire for statehood is performed through the landscape of Guaynabo. Minority legislators believe that Guaynabo City represents a failed experiment to Americanise Puerto Rican identity – which, according to their take on status, is historically resistant to the United States. As an endorsement of cultural assimilation, Guaynabo City is sub-hegemonic in that it significantly reworks the central PNP discourse on the resilience of Puerto Ricanness under statehood. While the centre insists that "our language and culture are not negotiable" (Romero-Barceló, 1978: 25), Guaynabo City would appear to contradict this assertion.

5.5 Caguas, *Nuestro Nuevo País* (Our New Country)

Caguas, bordering San Juan to the south (Figure 5.2), is a local stronghold of the pro-Commonwealth PDP. The city has only ever had one pro-statehood mayor and has voted loyally with the PDP in the status plebiscites of 1968, 1993 and 1998 (Álvarez Rivera, 2010). However, Caguas is more changeable in terms of voting at the national level, having favoured gubernatorial candidates from both main parties over the years – including the PNP’s Luis Fortuño in 2008. As such, the city is often regarded as a “barometer” of national electoral politics (Pérez, 2010: 26). Caguas’ economy is a mixture of commerce, high technology manufacture, services, and government. With a population of 142,893, it is the fifth largest city in Puerto Rico (US Census Bureau, 2012a: 30).

Like Guaynabo, Caguas had a long-standing mayor who oversaw social, economic and cultural transformations to the municipality. William Miranda Marín, mayor of Caguas from 1997 until his death in 2010, developed the city according to a decision-making model that became known as *la gobernanza democrática* (‘democratic governance’) (Rabell et al, 2007). This model identifies citizen participation in government as an ‘antidote’ to Puerto Rico’s colonial dependency culture. Moreover, it aims to foster in its citizens a strong sense of Puerto Rican national identity as a foundation for local participatory democracy.¹⁹ As such, Puerto Rican national culture has been put to the service of a locally realisable ‘spiritual decolonisation’ (Miranda Marín, 2008: 27). Miranda Marín’s son, William Miranda Torres, took over as mayor of Caguas following a special election event in August 2010. Winning the election by a landslide, Miranda Torres echoes the political views and policies of his father.

These practices of local government and national culture are evident in the slogans of Caguas, which feature prominently in the municipal vision statement: *Caguas, Nuestro Nuevo País, Centro y Corazón de Puerto Rico* (Caguas, Our New Country, Centre and Heart of Puerto Rico). Caguas is also known as *La Ciudad Criolla*, or ‘the Creole City’. ‘Creole’ references the PDP’s belief that

¹⁹*La gobernanza democrática* is explored in detail in the following chapter.

Puerto Ricans are essentially composed of three ethnic pillars: Spanish, indigenous Indian, and African. As Mayor Miranda Torres explained to me in written correspondence, “the most important aspects of Caguas are citizen participation and creole pride. That pride is expressed in our vision of a New Country” (Miranda Torres, 2011: 1). As in ‘Guaynabo City’, the slogans of Caguas find material expression across the municipality (Figure 5.5), and reflect a number of discourses related to a centrally prescribed status position. In particular, material change in Caguas sub-hegemonically reifies the traditional stance of the pro-Commonwealth PDP on Puerto Rican identity: cultural nationalism. This is about promoting Puerto Ricanness as a specifically national gesture of resistance to the statehood position, which the party considers to be assimilationist (Dávila, 1997: 61; Duchesne Winter, 2007: 92). Material changes to the everyday, lived environment of Caguas therefore bring into being and normalise discourses of Puerto Rican identity that are consistent with the status position of the late mayor.



Figure 5.5: *Caguas, Nuestro Nuevo Pais*, as featured on the Caguas ‘trolley’.
(Field photo)

The changes that Miranda Senior implemented to Caguas’ urban landscape during his mayoralty reflect and reinforce three hegemonic

discourses which are related to the PDP's pro-Commonwealth status position, and contrast with that of the pro-statehood PNP. First, Puerto Rican identity is composed of three essential ethnic elements, which distinguish it from the United States. Notably, the PDP's ideology of cultural nationalism implicitly excludes the United States and denies the possibility of its influence on Puerto Rican culture. Second, the strength of this identity constitutes Puerto Ricans as an inassimilable Caribbean and Latin American nation. Third, the celebration of national culture offers Puerto Ricans a path to decolonisation without formal political separation. These discourses are examined below as they are manifested, in Miranda Torres' (2011: 6) words, in the "tangible works" of Caguas: its statues, sculptures, museums, gardens and pathways.

Caguas has become one of Puerto Rico's most important destinations for cultural tourism by promoting the values of *criollismo*, or 'creole identity'. *Criollismo* is based upon the centuries-old myth that Puerto Ricans are the product of a harmonious mix of three ethnicities: Spanish colonisers, indigenous *Taíno* Indians and African slaves, usually in this order of importance (Jiménez Román, 1996: 8). The PDP subscribes to this same discourse on identity in their central cultural policy, which has traditionally celebrated these three ethnicities as the essential "pillars" of Puerto Ricanness (PDP, 2010: 22) and the phenotypical ingredients of *la Gran Familia Puertorriqueña* (the Great Puerto Rican Family), bound together by a common language, culture and history (Jiménez Román, 1996: 9). Dávila (1997) notes that the PDP sought to perpetuate this myth through the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture - a new institution of central government established by the party three years after the creation of Commonwealth in 1952. According to the tourism office, Caguas is known as *La Ciudad Criolla* ('the Creole City') because it was "the first island community to claim as its own and extol the distinct Puerto Rican ('creole') identity that emerged from th[is] fusion":

Caguas symbolizes all that is genuinely creole. It represents everything that we as Puerto Ricans love about our country... that which is genuine... That which is autochthonous... That which undeniably characterizes us as a people and makes us proclaim

with pride to the whole world, that we are Puerto Ricans. (*Oficina de Turismo*, 2010:2)

Caguas commemorates “the three ethnicities that bring the Puerto Rican heart to life” (2010: 3) with three huge monuments, positioned by the main roads that enter the urban centre from the north, south and east. *Los Portales de la Ciudad* (The Gateways to the City) are comprised of the Monument to Taina Heritage at the Northern Gateway, the Monument to African Heritage at the Eastern Gateway, and the Monument to European Heritage at the Southern Gateway (Figure 5.6). Further, the Western Gateway is marked by Caguas’ Botanical and Cultural Garden, which features the municipality’s official symbol – the *pitirre* (grey kingbird) - in the form of a large sculpture above its entrance (top left, Figure 5.6):

The *pitirre*, in our cultural and literary history, is the metaphorical image of the liberty of spirit and national conscience in defense of the autochthonous, of our incorruptible Puerto Ricanness...

The combative capacity of this creole bird, its fervour in protecting its natural territory, represents the valiant struggle in the affirmation of our Puerto Rican personality... Small but extraordinarily brave, it is known for taking on in combat birds which are considerably larger and more awesome. (*Departamento de Ornato y Embellecimiento*, 2009: 5)



Figure 5.6: The Portals to the City (top right and below) and entrance of the Botanical and Cultural Garden (top left) – which together mark the entrance to the urban centre of Caguas via the four main roads from the north, south, east and west. (Source: *Departamento de Ornato y Embellecimiento*, 2009: 62)

The United States is notably excluded from these material representations of Puerto Ricanness. Indeed, it is implicitly constructed as Puerto Rico's cultural Other: a source of corruption, 'considerably larger and more awesome', to be combated in a 'valiant struggle' to affirm the 'Puerto Rican personality', 'national conscience' and 'natural territory' (2009: 5). This is consistent with the attempt of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture to construct a "hispanic civilisation menaced by the 'other', the North American" (González, 2000: 99). Such implicit anti-statehood bias contrasts with the views on Puerto Rican culture articulated by the mayor of Guaynabo, who believed "the population of Puerto Rico has grown culturally through its exchange with American culture" (Interview, Mayor, Guaynabo). Cultural nationalist ideology also extends to the three principal museums of the city, which depict a version of Puerto Ricanness that predates the United States' invasion of the island in 1898. Here the cultural achievements of Puerto Ricans in the 110 years since

are celebrated as signs of the strength of a nation in spite of continued US territorial occupation. As Caguas' Director of Culture explained:

- DC: We don't give them [the United States] much credit here. The main mention they get is as invaders. We work with the phrase "North American invasion".
- CE: Would that happen in the museums of San Juan?
- DC: No! Actually, in recent years we've stood out by hosting the presentations of books about notable *independentistas*, about Filiberto Ojeda, which we discuss in a critical way. That would never happen in San Juan. Never. Nor in other municipal governments - there's no space for that.

The implication above is that Caguas' museums exclude the United States in its representations of Puerto Rican identity more so than other museums on the island, such as those managed centrally from San Juan. In the Director's view, when the pro-statehood PNP is in power, partisan administrators in the central Department of Culture look to limit expressions of nationalist sentiment and play up Puerto Rico's closeness to the United States. She also feels that this practice of regulating culture takes place in municipalities controlled by the PNP.

Second, consistent with hegemonic PDP discourse, the public works of Caguas also reflect the conviction of the local administration that Puerto Rico constitutes a nation. As mayor Miranda Torres wrote to me, "our cultural histories forge a cultural heritage that we *Cagueños* treasure, and provoke us to be guardians of that *criollismo* which is representative of the Puerto Rican nationality." (Miranda Torres, 2011: 5). This statement is consistent with the PDP's official party line that "Puerto Rico is a nation... because nationality is directly related to the history and culture of a people", and not to "its political or juridical state" (PDP, 2010: 19). Further, the exclusion of the United States from representations of Puerto Rican culture in Caguas reinforces the PDP's view that Puerto Rico's "sociological development" makes it a "country distinct from the United States" and "the principal factor in understanding why statehood is incompatible with the Puerto Rican nation" (PDP, 2010: 65).

The PDP's hegemonic position on Puerto Rican nationhood is reinforced in Caguas' landscape through a cultural project in the urban centre known as *La Ruta del Corazón Criollo* (Route of the Creole Heart). This is a pedestrian route between Caguas' museums, art galleries, cathedrals and plazas that is inscribed, stop by stop, into the pavements of the urban centre. The *Ruta* is described as a "journey through our own essence as a people and as individuals" (*Oficina de Turismo*, 2009: 1). The Caguas tourism office even produces a *pasaporte* (passport) which visitors and school parties are encouraged to have stamped at every stop along the *Ruta* - a clear gesture of nationhood (Figure 5.7). Further, while discussing nationality, the Director of Culture noted that Guaynabo hosts an excellent museum dedicated to Puerto Rico's international achievements in sport, and had plans to construct an 'Olympic Boulevard' nearby. However, she believed it was "contradictory" for a vehemently pro-statehood mayor such as O'Neill to promote Puerto Rican culture and at the same time deny the existence of Puerto Rican nationhood. Specifically, she noted it was ironic for statehooders to celebrate Puerto Rico's Olympic team given that under statehood it would surely cease to exist. This assessment reveals the prevailing sentiment shared between the PDP and PIP that cultural nationalism is the privileged terrain of the anti-statehood parties: the PNP is unable to celebrate Puerto Rican culture without undermining their own statehood cause.



Figure 5.7: The Caguas Passport (Source: *Oficina de Turismo*, n.d.)

Third, public works in Caguas reinforces the hegemonic PDP discourse that celebrating national culture offers Puerto Ricans a path to decolonisation without formal political separation. Just as Commonwealth architect Luis Muñoz Marín referred to national culture as an “internal decolonisation” (Soto-Crespo, 2006: 714) for Puerto Ricans, so mayor Miranda Marín understood that *criollismo* enables a “spiritual decolonisation” that “activates the creative individual and collective energy that drives our new generations... to ensure the wellbeing and progress of the people” (Miranda Marín, 2007: 35). In this view, Puerto Ricans may fully realise the creative potential of national identity without demanding political independence from the United States. “On visiting the eleven stations of the *Ruta*,” the late mayor Miranda Marín declares,

you will note the historic and civic conscience of Caguas in its proud determination to reaffirm the self-esteem, the feeling and appreciation of our patriotic symbols which inspire our community management... We invite you to return to Caguas whenever your spirit claims that desire for renovation, strength and freedom.” (*Oficina de Turismo*, 2009: 1)

As in Guaynabo, this passage hints that the late mayor's status position is entangled with his particular approach to local decision-making. Specifically, his thoughts on the decolonising potential of national culture would appear to form a basis for his participatory model of 'community management'. This point shall be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. Generally, however, cultural provision in Caguas represents an attempt to combat colonialism locally. This takes place by addressing what the municipal administration understands as three manifestations of colonialism in the Puerto Rican people: low self-esteem, a lack of national awareness, and a psychological dependency on the United States.

The problem of colonialism is low self-esteem, and lack of knowledge as a people. I mean, that Puerto Rico isn't good for anything, doesn't have its own resources. That's what they teach us when we're small - that we must depend on the United States. No, Puerto Rico is a country with a rich culture, a rich history, with resources – so culture's a means to the spiritual

decolonisation of our people, as the Mayor used to say... That's what the *Portales* are about, the *Ruta*, the botanical garden. (Former Special Assistant to Mayor, Caguas)

There are many years of colonialism here; we've had over 500 years of colonialism. Puerto Rico is the oldest colony in the world. Before we didn't even want to accept that, but I believe that there is now, yes, an acceptance that it is a colony. Well, at the least, that is what I can tell you in Caguas. But there's a long way to go, that lack of awareness, that fear coursing through the veins of the people - that without the *gringos*²⁰ we'd be screwed. (Director of Culture, Caguas)

Here it is apparent that spiritual decolonisation is about exorcising the United States from Puerto Rican identity. Though she believes that Caguas' investment in culture has been a great success, the Director of Culture laments that the United States continues to regulate Puerto Rican identity, assuming the form of the psychological dependency felt by many Puerto Ricans. Mayor O'Neill of Guaynabo exhibited this with his strong sense of gratitude to the United States for having developed the island. Psychological dependency is therefore a position that is perhaps most easily associated with statehood.

The inscription of hegemonic PDP positions on status in Caguas' landscape becomes particularly clear upon considering the views of PIP and PNP legislators about the meaning of Caguas' slogan. For example, Guaynabo's PIP legislator reads the municipal slogan *Nuestro Nuevo País* as a local declaration of independence by the late mayor, which he considers "pure demagoguery":

Because Miranda Marín, when the supreme moment of definition arrived, never assumed that stance in a public plaza, in a speech... I think he knew that the Puerto Rican has a great *independentista* feeling, but that he's scared to actually take the step. So they've [the PDP in Caguas] immersed themselves in that frontier, tapping into the feeling of the people, and at the same time saying: ah, I'll maintain your American citizenship, and you can continue depending on federal funds. So the people have the best of both worlds, as they would say. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

²⁰*Gringo* is a generally derogatory slang word used throughout Latin America to refer to someone from the United States.

In this view the cultural changes in Caguas reflect the PDP's traditional discourse of the 'best of both worlds' (PDP, 2010: 133) – that culture may be celebrated as if Puerto Rico were independent, without actually being so. Similarly reading the slogan as a pro-independence gesture, Guaynabo's PNP legislator notes:

If Caguas became PNP, they're going to change the slogan. It won't be Our New Country, it's going to be something else. *I bet you that.*²¹ (PNP legislator, Guaynabo)

To summarise this section, the decisions made by Caguas' late mayor on landscape accurately reproduce three hegemonic positions on the status question as set by the leadership of the PDP: first, that Puerto Rican identity is composed of three essential ethnic elements, to the exclusion of the United States; second, that Puerto Rico is an inassimilable nation; and third, that celebrating national culture offers Puerto Ricans a path to decolonisation without political separation from the United States. By comparison, the inscription of status positions in Guaynabo was considered to significantly rework official PNP discourse by emphasising Puerto Rico's cultural compatibility with the United States.

5.6 Lares, *Ciudad del Grito* (City of the Shout)

The municipality of Lares is located in the mountainous central eastern region of the island (Figure 5.1). Lares' rural geography and economy - historically based on coffee and livestock - differentiate it from the urban areas of Guaynabo and Caguas. Today the municipal economy is principally characterised by heavy reliance on government employment, with agriculture forming a relatively small part of overall economic activity (*Municipio Autónomo de Lares*, 2010). As this suggests, Lares' economy is highly dependent upon public funds from the central and federal governments in San Juan and the

²¹ The interviewee switched languages and spoke the phrase 'I bet you that' in English. I have italicised it to distinguish it from the rest of the dialogue, spoken in Spanish.

United States - a situation that is typical of the vast majority of isolated rural municipalities in Puerto Rico (Trías Monge, 1997: 120). As of 2010, Lares had 30,753 inhabitants (US Census Bureau, 2012a: 30). For decades it was a stronghold of the PDP, whose electoral support has traditionally been greatest in Puerto Rico's mountainous interior (Anderson, 1988: 17). Although Lares' population voted with the PDP in the plebiscites of 1967, 1993 and 1998, the PNP has made significant electoral inroads in the municipality since 1992, having dominating municipal and gubernatorial elections (Álvarez Rivera, 2010). Roberto Pagán, the incumbent PNP mayor, took office in 2004 and was re-elected by small margins in 2008 and 2012.

Lares is the site of Puerto Rico's only declaration of independence. The short-lived uprising, known as the *Grito de Lares* (The Shout of Lares), took place on 23 September, 1868, and was quashed the very next day by the Spanish. The *Grito* was a reaction to the long-term neglect and oppression of Spanish colonial rule, triggered by short and medium-term factors. Politically, Puerto Ricans had been denied freedoms of the press, of speech and of assembly. They had also endured a "rigid administrative centralism" (González Ruiz, 2010: 22) that required authorisation from Madrid for the most basic matters of public administration. Socially, Puerto Ricans were subjected to the *libreta* system, under which all individuals without land nor employment were forced to work for a patron and carry with them a *libreta*, or notebook, detailing their every activity (2010: 23). Economically, Puerto Rico had suffered heavy taxation, high unemployment, currency shortages, and an agricultural crisis.

The revolt is remembered through Lares' municipal slogan, *La Ciudad del Grito* (The City of the Shout). This is displayed throughout the municipality with paintings of the slogan and revolutionary flag on bridges, walls, benches and bus stops (Figure 5.8). Further, Lares' *Plaza de la Revolución* - the historic town square in which the republic was first declared - features two material tributes to the uprising. The first is a bust of its leader, Ramón Emeterio Betances, which faces the cathedral. The second, at the opposite end of the square, is a tamarind tree, gifted to Lares from Simón Bolívar's Venezuela estate in 1932. In a

symbolic gesture, it was planted by nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos using soil from the eighteen Spanish-speaking Latin American republics. Since 1927 the anniversary of the *Grito* has been celebrated with an annual gathering in the *Plaza de la Revolución*. This event attracts thousands of *independentistas* from all parts of the island, and includes a program of rallies, processions, political speakers and theatre performances.



Figure 5.8: Graffiti of the town slogan, *Ciudad del Grito*, in the centre of Lares (Field photo)

As in Guaynabo and Caguas, Lares' slogan is connected to hegemonic discourses on Puerto Rican identity as articulated by a party political status position. Just as performances of Puerto Rican identity in Caguas and Guaynabo reproduce and reinterpret the partisan conceptions of the PDP and PNP, so Lares' slogan reproduces the identity discourses of the PIP and other *independentista* factions. Owing to its revolutionary past, Lares is a symbol of their belief in political nationalism - political independence as the fullest expression of a separate cultural nationhood (Berríos Martínez, 1997). As such, PIP leader Fernando Martín García describes Lares as "the crucible and womb of the Puerto Rican nationality" (Martín García, 2006: 9) and calls Emeterio Betances "the father of the Puerto Rican nation" (2006: 9). Similarly, González

Ruiz (2008: 11) writes in the municipal magazine that "the *Grito de Lares* fully defines our idiosyncrasy as a people" and "symbolises the valiant and patriotic defense of our national culture and right to freedom before the ignominious contempt of a foreign power". Moreover, for González Ruiz, celebrating the *Grito* has contemporary relevance as an act of resistance against the "ruthless cultural aggression" of the United States: "[a]mbivalence has been promoted at the official level - two languages, two flags, two hymns, two loyalties - which has created an identity conflict in some sectors... But at the moment of truth, what we are comes to the surface: Puerto Ricans" (González Ruiz, 2008: 11).

The anniversary of the *Grito de Lares* is celebrated in the municipality through an annual activist event that is directed by the pro-independence parties. As such 23 September, the *Día del Grito* (Day of the Shout), becomes an occasion for the performative reproduction of hegemonic *independentista* discourse. The uprising is remembered by thousands of independence supporters who meet in the *Plaza de la Revolución*, at the "altar of our nation" (González Ruiz, 2008: 11). Pro-independence ideals are performed through speeches, processions and theatre. I attended the 142nd anniversary event. Calls were made for unity between *independentista* factions - a likely reflection on the PIP's disastrous performance in the 2008 general elections.²² Speeches demanded Puerto Rico's immediate decolonisation, with Mari Pesquera declaring there would be "no retreat until we reach the true and absolute independence of this nation" (Field notes: 23/9/10). The recent passing of two important *independentista* figures was honoured, including Juan Marí Bras, who had famously renounced his US citizenship in 1994. Attendees also observed the fifth anniversary of the FBI's assassination of pro-independence fugitive Filiberto Ojeda Ríos.²³ Multiple artisan kiosks sold artefacts adorned with the

²² In 2008 the PIP took just 2.0% of votes for governor - a historic low for the party. As a result it lost its formal recognition as a political party by the State Elections Commission, and had to collect signatures on a petition for re-enlistment in 2012.

²³ Ojeda Ríos was the head of the Puerto Rican terrorist group *los Macheteros* (the Cane Cutters), which has claimed responsibility for fatal bombings on the island and mainland. However, most *independentistas* consider him a martyr to the cause for independence. They also strongly suspect that the FBI deliberately planned his assassination for 23 September as a symbolic gesture against the independence movement (Field notes: 15/8/09).

symbols of independence, such as the Lares revolutionary flag and the machete, icon of armed struggle.

However, during fieldwork in July 2010, mayor Pagán quietly introduced a new slogan to Lares that has been interpreted by many - *independentistas*, *populares* and even members of his own party - as an attempt to displace the town's historic identity as the *Ciudad del Grito* (Caquías Cruz, 2010). This new slogan, declaring that Lares was the *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* (City of the Open Skies), appeared on two new large structures located beside main access routes to the town centre (Figure 5.9). As with the slogans of Guaynabo and Caguas, the new slogan of Lares became present throughout the municipal landscape on signage and public vehicles, while depictions of the *Grito* slogan were removed. The series of events relating to the installation of the structures in late 2010, and local explanations of the associated controversy, demonstrate how Lares has become a site for the articulation and contestation of hegemonic status discourses through performances of power in material space. Two versions of state power – statehood and independence – compete for hegemony in Lares' landscape. First, Pagán's attempt to displace the *Grito* slogan may be read as a pro-statehood move to cancel out *independentista* discourse, because the PNP is fundamentally anti-independence. Second, the struggles of local activists to reinscribe the *Grito* slogan across municipal space reflects the agency of non-elite groups to contest Pagán's inscriptions and reaffirm *independentista* discourse.



Figure 5.9: Mural to Lares, City of the Open Skies, by the entrance to the town centre on road PR-111. (Field photo)

Roberto Pagán first introduced the slogan *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* to the public in 2007 using the municipal magazine, *Surcos Lareños*. A short piece entitled *Frases a Lares* (Expressions for Lares) listed the ten slogans by which the town has been previously known, including *Ciudad del Grito* (see Appendix 10.7). However, the piece notes that "the expressions are not traditions, they are words to promote [the town] by their habitual use" (*Surcos Lareños*, 2007: 12). It attempts to legitimise the new slogan by asserting that place-naming is apolitical. The article continues: "Lares has been known by different expressions - there is not one in particular. Therefore, '*Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos*' has been deemed very wise for receiving our visitors, and will remain for our history" (2007: 12). The phrase first appeared in Lares' urban environment towards the end of that year, featuring on redecorated municipal vehicles and a small electronic sign in a plaza close to the town centre (Interview, PDP Legislator, Lares). At the same time, Pagán's administration gradually went about erasing the historic *Grito* slogan from several locations in the centre in the course of repainting projects and beautification works.²⁴

²⁴ Yamil Guzmán, activist leader opposing the mayor's changes, noted in interview that the phrase *Ciudad del Grito* used to feature on the three bridges that welcome all vehicles to the

Three and a half years later in July 2010, and without prior notice, two prominent, floodlit structures welcoming vehicles to the *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* materialised in central Lares (Figure 5.9 above). Community protest erupted within weeks, framing the gesture as an attempt to erase the town's *independentista* history as the site of the *Grito*. In a letter to the mayor, Lares' PIP municipal legislator objected: "our fellow citizens understand that this represents no event, circumstance or characteristic that identifies us as a town" (Lucena, 2010: 1). Rather, he noted, "it is known by all that you have communicated publicly that the new slogan arises from a prophecy relayed to you by a pastor²⁵, that Lares would be the City of Open Skies" (2010: 1). Similarly, Father Dennys Cruz, catholic priest of the historic church *San José de la Montaña* on the *Plaza de la Revolución*, wrote in an open letter to the community that "to go against our history is no less grave than the injustices that provoked the uprising of our town's inhabitants over 140 years ago... I must protest these recent tendencies to use religious expressions to administer political power" (Dennys Cruz, 2010: 1). Mayor Pagán drew further criticism once the story spread to the national press in August. Even his brother Felix, mayor of Lares for the PDP between 1980 and 1988, implored him "to respect the indelible pages that history has written" (Pagán Centeno, 2010: 23). In October, Pagán and the Municipality of Lares were sued in Puerto Rico's Federal Courts by two Lares citizens who argued his "use of public funds to advance a personal religious ideal" violated the principle of the separation of church and state established in the US and Puerto Rican constitutions (*Tribunal de Primera Instancia*, 2010: 1).

Mayor Pagán explained the origins of the slogan to me in interview. Our conversation confirmed that it is indeed a personal one rooted in his religious beliefs. Specifically, it is a tribute to his conviction that God had actively helped him to govern the town by performing miracles:

centre of Lares. Purportedly, it was also displayed in municipal car parks and at a location in front of the town hall.

²⁵ Pagán is a member of the Pentecostal movement within the protestant denomination of Christianity. Pentecostalism places emphasis on the direct, personal experience of God.

Before I was mayor [2003], I made a campaign promise, and said: I'm going to raise the salaries of all the municipal employees here. The moment arrived to do it, and there wasn't the money. I met with the finance director and the auditor, and said: prepare yourselves, because we're raising everyone's salary. They said, how are you going to do it? There isn't the money. I said, it was a promise I gave. I know the people will support me. We're going to do it. Prepare everything.

A week before the time was up to make the raise, I took a call from OCAM²⁶, which for years had been making mistakes with Lares. There was \$300,000 designated for us that we hadn't been given. And guess how much money I needed to raise the salaries? \$300,000...

For me it was a miracle of God. See? So in that way, God has been helping me in everything we've been doing. God gave me an alternative. And to thank God for managing me, I said: many are the blessings that have arrived here. This comes from the skies of God. That's why I put Lares, City of the Open Skies.

Though Pagán justifies the change as a purely religious gesture, it is also significantly political. First, as Lares' PDP legislator explained to me, it relates to a local power struggle between the Catholic and Protestant churches. The phrase 'Open Skies' is preached in the Pentecostal church, which has recently grown to encompass every neighbourhood in the municipality. The legislator notes that while the Catholic church "doesn't accept politics", the Pentecostal church permits affiliated mayors to use religious services "to distribute literature and collect votes". As such, Pagán's structures to the *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* may be read as an attempt to cement the local control of the Pentecostal church in Lares. Second, it is known that the Pentecostal movement in Puerto Rico is closely linked to the statehood movement (Martínez-Ramírez, 2005: 113). This raises the question of the relationship between Pagán's town slogan and his status position.

Two leaders of a community activist group fighting the slogan are convinced that it is fundamentally connected to the mayor's pro-statehood

²⁶ The *Oficina del Comisionado de Asuntos Municipales* (Office of the Commissioner of Municipal Affairs, or OCAM) is the office of central government responsible for the distribution of federal funds to the smaller municipalities, which lack the administrative autonomy to deal with the federal agencies directly. This office is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

beliefs. Specifically, it represents Pagán's attempt, informed by hegemonic pro-statehood discourse, to neutralise a rival status position. Local *independentista* historian Alfredo Gonzalez, founder of *Lareños en Defensa del Patrimonio Histórico* (People of Lares in Defense of Historical Heritage), believes that the PNP has been "searching for new strategies to make Puerto Rico a state" due to their failure to secure victories for statehood in plebiscites:

As part of a change in strategy, local annexationist leaders, which is the case with O'Neill in Guaynabo and now here with Pagán... understand that it's necessary to take away from the people the traits that define us as a people. Pagán isn't using English, but he's using another criterion that he understands could derail our identity: hiding history. You have to take Lares off the panorama as the City of the *Grito*. It has an explicit and intrinsic meaning that here in Puerto Rico, people fought for the freedom of the country. That complicates his hope to see Puerto Rico as a state. (Interview, Alfredo González)

Yamil Guzmán, spokesman for the activist group, concurs. Guzmán is a statehood supporter and even worked for Pagán as the head of his re-election campaign in 2008. However, he advocates an *estadidad jíbara* or 'creole statehood' - political integration with the full preservation of symbols of Puerto Rican identity. Despite sharing a desire for statehood, he is therefore critical of "pro-statehood mayors... [who] have attempted to undermine the symbols of our culture and history":

For example, with the *Grito de Lares* - there was a mayor in the past [1989-1993], Héctor Hernández Arana, the only other PNP mayor Lares has ever had. He tried to cut down the tamarind tree. The *Grito* is a pending issue for them, and the current mayor is trying to finish it off. Why? To take Lares' personality away, so they can present to the United States that we want to be a state. (Interview, Yamil Guzmán)

In sum, at the core of the controversy in Lares is the debate on Puerto Rican identity and its inscription in landscape. Ultimately, it is about whether the *Grito de Lares* - Puerto Rico's only declaration of independence - should or should not be considered an important symbol for Puerto Ricans. The fact that

Pagán has been criticised by members of all political parties - even his own - indicates that most politicians would consider it to be important. However, Pagán, like O'Neill of Guaynabo, is a fanatical statehood supporter. He is demonstrably loyal to the symbols of the United States. Notably, during a break in our interview I counted eighteen ornaments of the American Eagle around his office - seventeen decorated with the American flag and one with the eagle perched above the Puerto Rican flag. I also noted an ornamental liberty bell and a small farm animal on a base that read 'United States of America' (Field notes: 18/1/11). If Pagán has not directly and consciously attempted to erase Lares' history with statehood in mind - as González accuses - then it is at least clear that he holds the slogan *Ciudad del Grito* in sufficient disregard so as to have no qualms about upstaging it. The way in which O'Neill defends Pagán suggests that a fanatical statehood supporter would indeed seek to displace the *independentista* identity of the town:

HON: You can't maintain the image <slaps fist> of a town of revolution. Fight the Spanish regime, fight the American regime. I don't think you can achieve things through violence, revolution... The tourists, if they said, "right, let's go to the [town of the] revolution", would you go with them?

CE: Well, perhaps I'd be interested to check it out if it was an important historic event for Puerto Ricans.

HON: It's an important historic event, but in terms of selling the image of the people, of what the Puerto Rican is - what that says is, fight the American nation who liberated us from the Spaniards... History can't be erased. It's a historic event, but you have to remember it, and learn from it.

The slogan change in Lares reflects the politically contested nature of place (Jess and Massey, 1995). The controversy is about how competing claims to the identity of a place are underscored by different interpretations of its past as well as present. Stakes are high, since the winner of the contest is empowered to "produc[e] images and creat[e] identities which then form the bases both of the future character of those pieces of space, and of the behaviour of people

towards them" (1995: 3). Indeed, O'Neill above envisages a future for Lares that is sanitised of its image of *independentista* struggle. More broadly, local change in Lares, alongside Guaynabo and Caguas, highlights the significance of the materiality of the status question. Just as Guaynabo and Caguas have used the built environment to cement conceptions of identity that correspond to their status preferences, so in Lares an *independentista* identity has been deconstructed through its material displacement by a new slogan. This displays a 'politics of erasure' - a reclamation of space by a political elite seeking to overwrite it with new meaning consistent with his hegemonic interests (Robinson, 2003: 275). As Guzmán puts it,

He [Pagán] started little by little, with the public vehicles, and carried on with small signs. A sticker, you can remove it. A sign, you can change it. But people only really get agitated when you make a monument. A statue, something of cement, of concrete, which costs \$250,000. (Interview, Yamil Guzmán)

González contends that one likely consequence of the new slogan's growing material presence in Lares is forgetting:

Visually, with the signs, he's departing from the premise that a picture is worth more than a thousand words... So if you see in all corners that Lares is the City of the Open Skies - well, the new generations will forget about the *Grito*. (Interview, Alfredo González)

Sánchez and Avilés (2001: 265) argue that Puerto Rican murals in New York "represent an affirmation of *puertorriqueñidad*" and "project a determination not to be erased from history" within a hegemonic Anglosaxon culture. Conversely, as González acknowledges above, the power of material spaces such as murals to celebrate and remember, and to contest, ends upon their physical destruction or erasure. The PNP president of Lares' municipal legislature, who is loyal to Pagán, defends the slogan, arguing that it is an apolitical addition and not a replacement, because "no-one can erase history":

You can't forget it! That cannot happen because it's in the books. So long as we teach it to our children in schools, as we do, and as

long as we celebrate it every 23 September as an important event, that's not going to happen... I think [the issue is] not that he gave Lares another name, it's that 'can this have more impact on the people than the *Grito de Lares*'. (PNP legislator, Lares)

However, the activists' fear that the *Grito* slogan could be lost over time would appear to be confirmed by Pagán's 2008 campaign phrase, which I saw on display at the PNP's Municipal Committee headquarters: 'Roberto Pagán: Making History'. It is likely that Pagán's personal slogan *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* forms a part of this hope to make history in Lares. Guzmán notes that Pagán also has a catchphrase:

He says "no man can change history, but he can make it"... So what's he doing? Making history as he wants it to be! He's saying, I want to erase that history because I can make it all over again. That's the situation (Interview, Yamil Guzmán)

Pagán's slogan was resisted by non-elite activists in a number of performed ways. These resistances contested Pagán's attempt to clear space for hegemonic statehood discourse by performatively reinscribing the hegemony of the *Grito*. On 12 September the activist group *Lareños en Defensa del Patrimonio Histórico* held a march against *La Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos*, attended by 1,500 protesters. Guzmán used the event to make a final call to Pagán to remove the structures before the commencement of legal action against him. Eleven days later, during the activism of the *Día del Grito*, stencilled graffiti reaffirming Lares as the '*Ciudad del Grito*' and demanding 'Freedom Now' appeared around the *Plaza de la Revolución*. Particular damage was sustained by the town hall - a symbolic gesture against the mayor (Figure 5.10). On 25 November, during the Lares' patron saint festival, Guzmán arrived to participate in the community parade with a float that mimicked the design of Pagan's *Cielos Abiertos* mural, reinterpreting it with the slogan *Ciudad del Grito* (Primera Hora, 2010). However, Pagán ordered his municipal police force to surround the float and prevent its participation. "It's another abuse by the mayor, another attempt to eliminate all that describes our customs... and a violation of our rights to free expression", sustained Guzmán (2010: 32). Pagán's ability to change the

municipality's historic slogan according to his personal religious ideal, as well as his authoritarian moves to clamp down on resistances to it, serve to illustrate the ultimate power that Puerto Rican mayors wield as the *caciques* (chieftains) of municipal space (Heine, 1993).



Figure 5.10: Graffiti damage to Lares town hall. (Field photo)

This said, Pagan's local power exercises are evidently entangled with a subservient relationship to central party positions. Lares enjoys little municipal autonomy and is highly dependent upon the central government. Pagán erected his new murals while the PNP were in power centrally. His erasure of the *Ciudad del Grito* slogan could therefore be interpreted in the context of a wider obligation, either perceived or real, to obey all central party positions – not its status position alone. Indeed, Pagán provided evidence of his subservient power relationship to the centre by sharing his imminent plans for yet another slogan, *Lares, Ciudad de Valores* (Lares, City of Values):

RP: There's going to be another place that will say Lares, City of Values. So, every 50 or 75 metres, there's going to be a post that we'll put, that contains one of those values. There are six.

CE: Could you tell me what those values are?

RP: Let's see, I'll bring them to you now, let's look for them...

<Ten minutes later, he talks to his secretary who has written the values down after making a telephone call>

RP: Right, the values are: One, respect. Two, kindness. Three, civility. Four, responsibility. Five, justice. Six, reliability. These are the six values that will be written in those places. People can read them every day to remember.... until they learn what we must be.

Pagán needed to check what the 'values' were because they corresponded to an official program of community values being promoted by the incumbent PNP central administration.²⁷ It is therefore clear that the mayor was planning to inscribe municipal landscape with messages hegemonically set from the centre.

By early 2011, the activists who had campaigned against the slogan had claimed a partial victory. While Pagán's murals to the *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* remained in Lares, the original *Grito* slogan was reinstated on the two bridges in the centre that had once displayed it (Figure 5.11). Alfredo González noted that his sources within the municipal administration had confirmed that plans for two further murals to the *Cielos Abiertos* had been withdrawn. The events in Lares therefore illustrate the possibilities for performed resistances to hegemony in a local political context.

²⁷ I collected a pamphlet entitled *Valores, Llévalos Contigo Siempre* (Values - Carry Them With You Always) from the Guaynabo legislature, detailing the very same six values.



Figure 5.11: The repainting of *Ciudad del Grito* in Lares centre, February 2011. (Field photo)

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which three Puerto Rican mayors have exercised their local powers over space to express their status positions in landscape. Decisions on municipal slogans and the built environment are bounded in perspectives on Puerto Rican identity, and by extension, political status. Material changes to the everyday, lived environment of the municipalities actively reproduce, rework and resist discourses on identity that are consistent with particular status positions. As such, the case studies demonstrate that the status question is not a predetermined aspect of Puerto Rican reality but rather constitutive of hegemonic discourses that are routinely brought into being and negotiated through performances in material space.

The municipalities, as 'peripheral centres of power' (Peet, 2007: 22), have produced varied sub-hegemonic effects. The assimilationist bent of change in Guaynabo significantly reworks the official PNP discourse on Puerto Rican identity, but is intended to promote statehood nonetheless. Caguas accurately reproduces, and thereby attempts to validate, the central position of the pro-Commonwealth PDP on cultural nationalism. Lares is a more

complicated site where two slogans, bounded in different status positions and narratives of Puerto Rican identity, compete for hegemony through contested performances in municipal space.

In sum, the mayors are seen to exercise their local power in ways that have resulted in the reinforcement, reinterpretation and resistance of hegemonic positions on the status question. However, each leader has strongly indicated that these power exercises – on the surface to do with status – are at the same time entangled with local concerns that may not be necessarily related to status positions. In Guaynabo O'Neill has provided residents with first-rate municipal services, but it is unclear how – or if – this service provision is related to his desire for statehood. In Caguas, while the promotion of Puerto Rican national culture as the 'New Country' might reflect the hegemonic positions of the PDP, it also appears to form part of a larger model of local participatory democracy that has not been explored here. Finally, in Lares Pagán's move to erase the *Grito* from municipal landscape may relate to his pro-statehood views, but his plans to copy a new central slogan (*Valores...*) would indicate a local priority to obey central positions more generally. These issues are tackled in the next chapter, which examines the relationship between the status question and everyday political practice in depth.

6 Structures and practices of power in everyday Puerto Rican politics

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the performative inscription of status positions in Puerto Rican municipal space. This chapter focuses on the relationship between status positions and the structures and everyday practices of politics in the municipalities. It asks how these state visions are reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through everyday practices of politics in concrete settings. It notes that the Autonomous Municipalities Act ascribes considerable powers to mayors who govern the municipalities according to all of their political concerns, both central and local. Conceptually, the chapter is based on the theories of everyday politics, performance and power outlined more fully in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

The first section presents evidence to indicate that local governance strategies and status positions become entangled through the routine practices of the municipal executives. These intersections demonstrate that elite performances of state power do not straightforwardly reproduce the hegemony of status, but rather, create a more complicated and varied terrain of contradictory, unintended and subversive effects. Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares are therefore sites of 'entanglements of power' (Sharp et al, 2000) where local political agendas and centrally prescribed hegemonic status positions are intractably knotted together through performances of local state power.

The second section notes, nonetheless, that the status positions of local political actors in these sites exist in parallel with other ideological positions and priorities that are not hegemonically set by status positions. Therefore, if it is possible to step outside of the predominance of status discourses, a number of alternative political practices come into clearer view that indicate the mayors' multiple goals – what else they look to achieve through exercising local political power. This said, there is not a clean separation between local politics and status politics in the municipal executives. Rather, they are still seen to

ambiguously interact and entangle, despite the claims of administrators to be able to keep them apart. The third section briefly considers the relationship between status positions and the routine practices of the municipal legislatures. Specifically, it examines the entanglements of status positions within the drafting, debate and passage of municipal ordinances and resolutions.

6.2 Entanglements of status in the municipal executives

This section suggests that routine practices of politics in the executive branches of Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares reflect three different approaches to governance that could be related to status positions. Specifically, it notes that the relationship of each administration to the status question is expressed in terms of its everyday practices and the connections that it forges with governments and institutions beyond the municipality. As the president of the Guaynabo legislature put it:

You're going to see that political tendency [status preference] reflected in the everyday life of the municipality... In the names of the streets, the names of the schools, at the level of the traffic signs, at the level of city slogans, in many other areas.... At the level of the philosophy of government. (PNP legislator, Guaynabo)

6.2.1 *Everyday politics in Guaynabo: statehood*

Certain aspects of governance in Guaynabo would appear to reflect Mayor O'Neill's preference for statehood. O'Neill has harnessed full municipal autonomy in ways that emphasise the closeness between Guaynabo and the United States. The former evidently looks towards the latter – not only in terms of landscape, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also through its notably rigorous compliance with federal laws, emphasised in various offices, and the connections forged with US federal government and mainland mayors. Moreover, daily executive operations in Guaynabo are run from 'City Hall'

(Figure 6.1). Revealingly, when it was unveiled in 2005, O'Neill proclaimed City Hall a symbol of political unity between Puerto Rico and the United States by finding the occasion "propitious, on this historic moment of our town, to cite the words of one of the greatest presidents of our Nation, Abraham Lincoln" (O'Neill; in Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 137). Guaynabo therefore demonstrates the salience of mimicry as a mechanism through which Western styles of governance are implemented in colonial contexts (Bhabha, 1994).



Figure 6.1: Guaynabo City Hall. (Field photo)

Thrift (2000b: 384) notes that mundane everyday practices bring particular worldviews into being: "national identity and an accompanying geopolitical stance are inscribed through the smallest of details". One such 'small detail' of pro-statehood everyday politics in Guaynabo is the prominent message that Puerto Ricans' possession of US national citizenship corresponds to an imperative to obey federal laws. The mayor circulates this message by distributing public information, a responsibility assumed under the Autonomous Municipalities Act (OMB, 2012: 42). Such information underscores the importance of federal compliance - to employees of executive municipal

government offices, contractors of public works, and citizens. Readers are firmly reminded that their routines must conform to the statutes and regulations set by federal agencies. For example, Figure 6.2 below details the front page of a public leaflet outlining the US Environmental Protection Agency's drainage regulations:

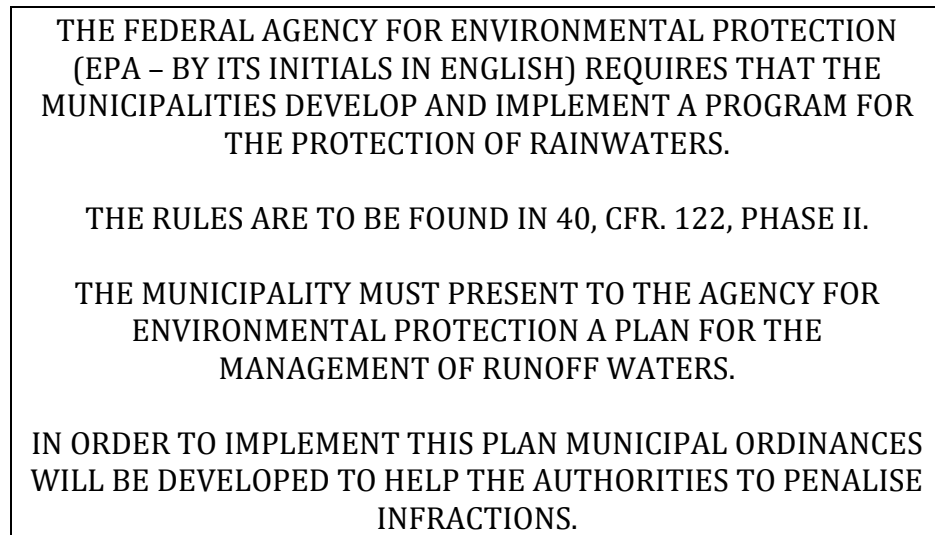


Figure 6.2: public leaflet about US Environmental Protection Agency regulations (translated). (Source: *Oficina de Ordenación Territorial*, 2010)

In Puerto Rico the state is a relatively weak and inefficient entity that Puerto Ricans successfully resist and defy through their everyday lives and practices (Picó, 2007). Within this context it is revealing that the everyday politics of Guaynabo attempt to reinforce the state, at least in appearance. This might indicate that the Guaynabo administration fully understands, and anticipates, the strengthening of state institutions that would inevitably occur if Puerto Rico ever achieved statehood. However, the Director of Federal Affairs indicates that her everyday work still involves difficult struggles against municipal residents – and even municipal employees - who resist her attempts to exact accountability for the federal benefits she administers:

We first look for funds for the programs, and second, help the directors [of other municipal executive departments] comply with

the necessary [federal] regulations attached to those funds. Sometimes it's very, very difficult to get people to understand that they have to comply with those rules. (Interview, Director, Office of Federal Affairs)

Her job is focused on emphasising the importance of federal compliance throughout the executive. She necessarily reinforces a message that the agencies of US federal government are the ultimate authority for citizens and the municipal administration. This is a message that ultimately corresponds to statehood. Indeed, as Caguas' PNP legislator put it, statehood is the very aspiration that "all our institutions of government be regulated by and conform to the rules laid down by the American nation... That their behaviour, observance, governance, be the same as in the state of Ohio, Wisconsin, Nebraska". However, as the everyday politics of Guaynabo demonstrate, the aspiration to statehood is complicated by the frequency of resistances to its rules.

O'Neill also exercises local power to forge connections with state governments and federal agencies of the United States. This has occurred on the back of several successful municipal programs. For example, his recycling initiative, in which 100% of Guaynabo residents participate, received federal recognition from the Environmental Protection Agency (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 102). Further, according to his biography, O'Neill "speaks with evident passion" of his New Housing Program, which is described as the first of its kind "in a city in the entire American Nation" (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 110). Reportedly, O'Neill inspired the governors of Florida and Louisiana to implement similar programs in their states after "the then Secretary of Federal Housing, Mel Martínez, today an influential Federal Republican Senator, visited the city to observe its development" (2009: 87) (Figure 6.3). O'Neill reflects, "during the course of the program I had meetings with secretary Martínez and the governor of Florida and good friend, Jeb Bush, who supported my work throughout" (2009: 88).



Figure 6.3: O'Neill in the US Department of Housing. The caption reads: "The Secretary of Federal Housing, Mel Martínez (with his friend O'Neill in the photograph), enthusiastically supported and later imitated Guaynabo's public housing program in various cities throughout the Nation." (Source: Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 86)

However, these attempts to emphasise closeness between Guaynabo and the United States through governance have created unintended effects. Namely, they inadvertently serve to accentuate the continued existence of significant linguistic differences between Puerto Rico and the United States. This represents one of the key impediments to the statehooders' ultimate goal of integration (Barreto, 2002). The mayor is unable to address an inconvenient truth - that most Puerto Ricans do not dominate English (Pousada, 2008: 138) – by making cosmetic changes to the built environment. In interview O'Neill stated that visitors to the municipality from Orlando once told him, "So you have all the streets in English? Well, it's logical that you have the traffic signs in English too" (Interview, Mayor, Guaynabo). However, his Director of Culture offered an alternative perspective that highlights the logistical difficulties of linguistic ambiguity in the municipality:

Soon the municipality is going to host some officials from the Florida state government. But out of the 2,200 employees in our

administration, you'd be surprised how difficult it is to get together just a small delegation that's fluent enough in English to show the visitors around. (Interview, Director of Culture, Guaynabo)

6.2.2 *Everyday politics in Caguas: soberanía (sovereignty)*

It is possible to interpret practices of politics in Caguas as a reflection of the status position of its late mayor, William Miranda Marín (Figure 6.4). Chapter 4 (section 4.2) mentioned that the PDP is divided internally on status between a mainstream position that supports the Commonwealth status quo and a minority faction that believes Puerto Rico is still a territory, and therefore colony, of the United States under Commonwealth. Miranda Marín was the de facto leader of the minority faction, known as the *soberanistas* (sovereignists), which advocates the development of Commonwealth towards a condition of full political sovereignty so as to end Puerto Rico's subjection to the Territorial Clause of the US Constitution (Rivera Ortiz, 2010). From this position, the *soberanistas* contend, Puerto Rico could then renegotiate a bilateral pact of free association with the United States. Acknowledging Puerto Rico's political sovereignty, the United States would retain only the state powers that Puerto Rico chooses to delegate back to it, subject to negotiation.



Figure 6.4: William Miranda Marín. (Source: Cantres Correa, 2007: 32)

Miranda Marín publicly aired his *soberanista* politics in a controversial speech before the PDP leadership in February 2010, six months before losing his fight against cancer. In clear resistance to the hegemonic status position of his party, he argued that Puerto Rico was still a colony and required sovereignty (but not full independence) in order to enable international political and economic relations with other countries. Further, sovereignty would allow Puerto Rico to respond to the “new world economic scenario” of globalisation and regional blocs (Miranda Marín, 2010: 4). As he put it, Puerto Rico must have “self-government, capable of relating us to all the countries of the world, without asking for permission from anyone... Political sovereignty is, before all, a project to recover the country’s economic viability which neither statehood nor colony make possible” (2010: 10). The minority *soberanista* status position within the PDP may therefore be considered an elite expression of counter-hegemony (Peet, 2007: 22) since it contends against the hegemonic party discourse that denies Puerto Rico is a colony, and advocates policy alternatives.

It is possible to relate three practices of power in Caguas to the *soberanista* status position of Miranda Marín, and his successor, Miranda Torres, who inherits his views. First, Caguas strives to realise the *soberanista* goal of engaging in international economic and political relations “without asking anyone for permission” (Miranda Marín, 2010: 9). Second, it attempts to reverse the city’s economic dependency on the United States by fostering economic development strategies that harness the opportunities of neoliberal globalisation. Third, Miranda Marín’s strong criticism of other modes of governance founded upon dependency relationships may be interpreted as a manifestation of his anti-statehood stance.

First, Caguas appears to pursue, in a local context, the *soberanista* goal of realising international relations. Economically, Caguas forges connections with foreign markets and companies through its annual trade fair EXPO CAGUAS, which places a particular emphasis on “business relationships with Latin America and the Caribbean” (*Caguas la Revista*, 2007: 15). EXPO CAGUAS enables the city’s small and medium-sized firms to build contacts with private

sector representatives, and even heads of state, from these regions. For example, in its debut year in 2007 the fair hosted business visitors from the Dominican Republic, Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica, St Vincent and the Grenadines (2007: 15), and in 2009, the Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis (Miranda Torres, 2010: 5).

Politically, Caguas connects with Latin American and European countries through international mayoral organisations. Notably, Miranda Marín was an executive committee member of the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Governments (FLACMA), for which Caguas has hosted a number of gatherings (Miranda Torres, 2010: 6). While O'Neill proudly received the recognition of United States agencies for his services to low-income families, Miranda Marín received FLACMA's highest honour, the Medal for Local Latin American and Caribbean Merit (Crossroads Order), in recognition of his model of 'democratic governance' (2010: 6). In sum, international practices in Caguas reflect the significance of 'para-diplomacy' – the potential of cities to exercise decentralised power in ways that secure their separate, subnational representation in a variety of international and regional organisations (Baldacchino, 2006: 860). Whether the achievement of international capabilities at the municipal scale complicates the logic for achieving it centrally – through the status question – is a crucial discussion that shall take place in the following chapter.

Second, Caguas' economic development policies appear to reflect the *soberanista* goal of reversing Puerto Rico's economic dependency on the United States through creating a self-sufficient economy based on Puerto Rican enterprise. A key moment towards this goal occurred in 2002 when Miranda Marín successfully lobbied the central legislature for an amendment to the Autonomous Municipalities Act, granting fully autonomous municipalities the power to establish municipal corporations. The following year Caguas unveiled INTECO (in English, the Central-Western Technological Initiative), a non-profit

regional²⁸ economic development organisation linking government to the private and academic sectors. INTECO encourages the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises in research, information systems, cultural industries, renewable energy, food security, and waste management (Miranda Torres, 2011: 7). By offering grants, training and mentoring to start-ups, INTECO attempts to “displace the handout culture with one of entrepreneurship and ventures” (Miranda Torres, 2010: 14).

It is possible that these measures to promote economic autonomy reflect a local acknowledgement of wider shifts in the terrain of the status debate towards specifically economic concerns, particularly from the US perspective (Gamaliel Ramos and Rivera Ortiz, 2001). Since Congress has made clear that any status change should be ‘revenue neutral’, Puerto Rican decision makers have been prompted to implement new measures for economic development so as to reverse the metropolitan dependency that currently stagnates debate for all positions. In this way economic change in Caguas could be read as a local project linked to Miranda Marín’s broader hope to see Puerto Rico achieve national sovereignty as a free associated state.

Miranda Marín’s landmark speech to the PDP party leadership argued for national sovereignty as the only mechanism through which Puerto Rico could harness the opportunities of the “new world economic scenario” of neoliberal globalisation and regional blocs (Miranda Marín, 2010: 4). Similarly, the Caguas administration has implemented a number of local changes that indicate an understanding of the need to adjust to global economic change for the purposes of competitiveness and growth. The municipal corporation INTECO has been utilised to prepare citizens for the so-called ‘knowledge economy’ through new educational services such as an independent high school specialising in sciences, mathematics and technology (CIMATEC), an interactive science and technology museum (C3tec; in English, the ‘Creole Centre of Sciences and Technology of the Caribbean’), and an IT training scheme for adults who are unemployed or made redundant (Miranda Torres, 2011: 13). Therefore, beyond a simplistically

²⁸While founded as a municipal corporation in Caguas, INTECO has expanded to encompass eight other municipalities in the central-Western region of Puerto Rico.

nationalistic reading, Caguas' slogan *Nuestro Nuevo Pais* also represents the city's readiness to face the challenges of a new global economic context as a "New Country", inserted into the emerging economy of globalisation" (Cantres Correa, 2007: 33).

Third, it is likely that Miranda Marín's critiques of dependency-based forms of governance correspond to his anti-statehood position. His attack on citizens who "complain from the passive position of the victim and wait for a saviour to take charge and rescue us from our suffering" (*Caguas la Revista*, 2010: 5) is a veiled parody of the statehood discourse, which posits this saviour as the United States. In another instance he lambasts politicians who "nourish and exploit the imaginary of lowliness" and "insist upon myopic insularisms... drawn to think of themselves only in a relation of dependency with the northern metropolis" (Miranda Marín, 2007: 2-3). This is a clear critique of what Girvan (2010: 6) in the Anglophone Caribbean context calls epistemic dependency; a colonised mentality. While Miranda Marín never referred to any party, administration or individual by name while airing these views, it is obvious that he is referring to the pro-statehood PNP. It is therefore feasible that he would have identified Guaynabo as a site where the 'imaginary of lowliness' was evident. His *soberanista* belief that "the first and principal resource of a country or nation is its people" (Miranda Marín, in Cantres Correa, 2007: 18) contrasts directly with O'Neill's pro-statehood argument that Puerto Ricans "don't have gold, we don't have agriculture, we don't have anything [but] a powerful American citizenship" (Interview, Mayor, Guaynabo).

6.2.3 *Everyday politics in Lares: struggling with the status quo*

Unlike Guaynabo and Caguas, routine political practices in Lares do not directly reflect the status positions of the mayor or his party. Rather, Lares relates to the status issue in that its municipal government is obliged to accept the limitations of the current status and work fully within the constraints of the domestic system that it establishes. This occurs because Lares exercises far

fewer autonomous powers than Guaynabo and Caguas - two municipalities that have achieved maximum autonomy and exploited it to connect with governments and institutions beyond the central state. By comparison, in Lares everyday politics is shaped by two deep layers of dependency. First, the municipality is reliant upon the offices of the central government to provide most of its budget. Second, given that these funds arriving from the centre are federally sourced, Lares is ultimately dependent upon the US federal government for its daily operation.

Lares' dependence on central government is expressed in its relationship to OCAM²⁹, the San Juan office responsible for providing financial and administrative support to the small municipalities, including the delivery of federal funds. It receives block grants from federal agencies, which are then divided up for distribution to individual municipal administrations. OCAM delivers to the small municipalities almost all of the resources they need to run. In this respect Lares is typical of most small municipalities. Indeed, in 2007 over 70% of the budget in 34 municipalities, including Lares, was formed of central subsidies (*Asociación de Alcaldes*, 2007: 7). As Pagán explains:

We're very limited because, on not having enough inhabitants - which must be 50,000 or over, we don't have the freedom to directly negotiate the federal assistance ourselves. We have to do it through the state office. Over there, they get a block, and then it's 'this is for you, this is for you, and this is for you'. But if we were the city I wish we were, we'd be able to go directly [to the federal agencies], and the benefits would be much larger.
(Interview, Mayor, Lares)

Here Pagán suggests that his capacity to administrate the town is directly affected by the amount of federal funding he is able to claim from the central government. This is also made clear by his response to my question about status:

²⁹Office of the Commissioner of Municipal Affairs.

- CE: The status issue, do you think it affects the way in which you do your work here? Could you see a link between status and what you do?
- RP: Well, no. At the moment, it doesn't affect it. There's a countryside saying that goes: 'you have to plough with the oxen you're given'.³⁰ Let me explain. In old times, we would whip the animals, the beasts, and they would work the land...And in this case, you have to govern with what you have, right? So, you have to deal with whatever we lack... and search for a way, as far as you can, to maintain a good environment. Even if there isn't much to give.

According to mayor Pagán the status issue - the debate itself - does not affect local governance because he understands that a formal change in the island's status could never be realised from the local scale. However, he does understand that the current status – the island's present juridical and political condition as opposed to the debate around it - places significant limits on the work he is able to perform as a local political actor. As a statehood supporter he reflects the conviction that this option would result in a bounty of federal funds (Romero-Barceló, 1978), especially to poor rural municipalities such as Lares. Pending the arrival of statehood, he must get on with everyday politics by making best use of the limited resources presently available to him.

Pagán explained the extent of his reliance on federal funds (Figure 6.5) in response to my question about the common ground held by all PNP members beyond a pro-statehood status position:

Well, we work for the wellbeing of the country. To work in a way that takes funds from the federal agencies, that bureaucracy. We depend greatly on the American nation, through federal funds. And I have to tell you that here in Lares, if it weren't for the federal programs, it would be difficult to work. Because they give me money for roads, social housing, money so I can work in the office, everything. (Interview, Mayor, Lares)

³⁰ This is how I have translated the original saying, *uno tiene que arar con los bueyes que le dan*.

For this reason, one of mayor Pagán's key local priorities as head of the municipal executive is to secure as much federal funding as possible for the town and safeguard the amount that it already receives. As an example, Pagán indicated serious concern with the results of the 2010 US Census³¹, which had shown that Lares' population decreased by 5,000 since the year 2000:

RP: [Showing me an official census document] It says here, if I have a query, a question, that I get in touch. We're going to do it, because I don't agree with the results. I understand that something went wrong, or the people didn't do their work. Because it's not possible that we've lost 5,000 people from 2000 to 2010.

CE: That's what the census said.

RP: Yes... But how many people didn't fill it out? No-one came round to my house to ask me, have you filled it out? No-one checked that all the families had done it. And this provokes unease because it makes the town smaller, reducing the funds that could arrive to Lares. Less money. That affects us.



Figure 6.5: Notices detailing various programs of federal assistance in Lares' Office of Federal Programs. (Field photo)

³¹ As a territory of the United States, Puerto Rico is fully accounted for in the US Census.

Lares' dependence on federal funds is further illustrated by Pagán's belief that national politics in the United States affects the work he is able to perform in the town. Given that Republican governments tend to be less generous than Democratic ones in terms of public spending, the party in power stateside can indirectly affect the amount of funds that arrive to municipal coffers via OCAM:

Right now, with a change in government in the US, which was controlled by the Republicans [before 2009], and is now controlled by the Democrats... They're more liberal about spending, and the Republicans are more timid. Well, that ends up limiting the work here. Because they start to make cuts, and if there are cuts there's no freedom of employment, the economic part doesn't come. (Interview, Mayor, Lares)

By "freedom of employment" Pagan is referring to the reality that the municipal government, the main employer in the town, relies directly on federal funds to provide that employment. Lares' high rate of government employment is therefore yet another symptom of its dependency on federal funds and struggle with the status quo.

6.3 Other local political concerns in the municipal executives

The above section suggested that routine political practices in Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares appear to be significantly entangled with status positions and status issues. However, this section underlines that much decision-making in each site takes place according to executive models of governance that are not hegemonically set by status positions or status issues. Rather, these models are based on other ideologies that are partially obscured by the predominance of status in the municipalities, where it necessarily defines local political actors and finds material expression in landscape. Nonetheless, these ideologies are at moments seen to become entangled with status positions. The general sense of mayors and executive directors is that status positions have no effect at all on governance:

Status? We're not going to waste resources talking about something we don't have the power to resolve... We are just focusing on how we are going to get things done. (Director, Office of External Resources, Caguas)

It [status] shouldn't affect it. On a daily basis, in fact it doesn't affect it... At the level of administrative decisions and the services that the executive gives to the people, it doesn't affect it at all. (Director, Department of Planning, Lares)

I know perfectly well how to separate one from the other. (Mayor of Guaynabo)

However, as this section demonstrates, the fact that status issues and positions are rarely discussed *directly* in the municipalities does not rule out the possibility of their influence in the structures and practices of local power.

6.3.1 Guaynabo: neoliberalism and paternalism

Despite the visually striking use of English in Guaynabo, O'Neill's governance in the municipality is principally informed by two ideologies that have no necessary relation to his preference for statehood: neoliberalism and paternalism. These ideologies are manifested in two major characteristics of governance in Guaynabo - the construction and maintenance of prestige communities for the rich, and the provision of extensive welfare programs for the poor.

A key aspect of mayor O'Neill's governance is heavy investment in the construction of gated communities and supporting retail and commercial services, such as shopping malls. Gating may be interpreted as a neoliberal urban strategy in that it corresponds to the privatisation of formerly public space (Aguirre et al, 2006: 4). The municipality collects property and business taxes from these developments to generate the island's second largest

municipal budget after the capital, San Juan.³² Guaynabo's budget returned a surplus and experienced steady growth every single fiscal year from 1992-3 to 2008-9 (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 96). O'Neill utilises these funds to provide Guaynabo's residents with high quality public services that he perceives are equivalent to the offerings of any city in the United States. In particular, Guaynabo is renowned for the efficiency of its rubbish collection, recycling program, and police force (Suárez Carrasquillo, 2011: 5).

While O'Neill's use of English in Guaynabo may indicate his desire for statehood, it also relates to a strategy for promoting the high-income residential communities. Indeed, Suárez Carrasquillo (2011: 7) identifies the Americanisation, gentrification and gating of residential communities in Guaynabo as the results of an active city marketing campaign that has the English language as its "cornerstone". "Consistent with the increased use of English by the municipality", he notes, "there is also an increased use of English in recent gated community developments" (2011: 6). These have names such as Regency Park, Grand View, and Murano Luxury. This, he argues, is "emblematic of the Puerto Rican colonial reality, where it is understood that the use of the English language confers a sense of prestige" (2011: 7). He therefore speculates that the municipal slogan 'Guaynabo City' and pervasive English-language signage form parts of a wider city marketing strategy. Building upon Carrasquillo's ideas, I was interested to ask the mayor whether the specific concept of Guaynabo City may have constituted a formal executive policy:

CE: Could you explain to me how you implemented your vision of Guaynabo City? Was there a Guaynabo City 'action plan' as such?

HON: No, but it's like this. You'll note that everyone knows that the services here are unique in Puerto Rico. Where there's a recycling system that goes from house to house, it only exists in Guaynabo. They're distinct things. You have to give meaning to what is distinctive, for the people.

³² For the financial year 2010-11, Guaynabo's total municipal income was \$130.4 million, with the two main sources - property and business taxes - taking \$45.3 million and \$48.7 million respectively (*Municipio Autónomo de Guaynabo*, 2012).

Understand? In that respect, Guaynabo City started. Guaynabo City, a five-star city, best quality of life, best healthcare, best roads, best maintenance, best vision, best services in Puerto Rico. As if it were a state. That's what it is.

O'Neill's response reveals that the Guaynabo City slogan is indeed a marketing strategy that attempts to promote his understanding of what constitutes a quality of life. While gentrification, gating and high-end service provision are not related to statehood directly, it is significant nonetheless that O'Neill's implementation of these strategies is entangled with (or inspired by) an assimilationist imaginary and a perception of the United States as the benchmark of quality.

O'Neill's governance is also informed by paternalistic ideology (Figure 6.6). Paternalism is defined as the belief of an organisation or state that the autonomy of some group should be limited for its own good, especially by providing for its needs without giving it responsibilities (Dworkin, 2010). Guaynabo offers low-income residents a range of municipal welfare initiatives that complement the social support received federally from mainland programs. After being sworn in for a fourth consecutive term in 2005, O'Neill announced: "[a]t this moment it is propitious... to reiterate once more what I have said so many times: I will continue to direct work that is sensitive to the needs of those who need the assistance of the programs and services of their Municipal Administration" (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 132).



Figure 6.6: Centrepiece in the ground floor lobby area of Guaynabo City Hall. The statues represent a mother providing for her needy child. (Field photo)

For example, O'Neill's biography *La Satisfacción de Servir* (The Satisfaction of Service) discusses two particular initiatives for low-income families: housing and school uniforms. One of O'Neill's first actions upon taking office in 1993 was to create the Department of Municipal Housing, making Guaynabo the first municipality to take charge of the construction of social housing under the Autonomous Municipalities Law.³³ This, as O'Neill notes, was a response to the needs of his constituents: "I'm not making it up when I say the first person I received in my office as Mayor in 1993 came to speak to me about the need of housing for his family. Actually, the first 20 or 30 people I attended to during my first days in office brought to me the problem of not having adequate housing or living under conditions that were extremely adverse to their safety and health" (in Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 109). The Department therefore created the Guaynabo New Housing Program, under which families are provided with a secure, modern residence as well as "ownership, signature

³³ Prior to this, all municipal social housing in Puerto Rico had been planned and constructed from central government.

and all, without any commitment of advance payment nor a monthly mortgage” (O’Neill, in Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 88).³⁴ Further, O’Neill’s ‘Vouchers for School Clothing Program’ has enabled low-income families to purchase uniforms for their children in public schools. The story of the program is recounted by O’Neill’s wife in the biography (Figure 6.7):

Figure 6.7: Guaynabo’s Vouchers for School Clothing Program

“One morning I went to represent Hector in an activity in a school of the Amelia sector... A little child approached me, who I noticed was watching me, and said: ‘you’re all rich’; I said to him ‘no, why do you say that?’, to which he replied: ‘because you have everything’. I noticed the little child’s humble clothing and broken shoes...I looked over the group of students and noticed that many were in similar conditions of dress.

That made me very depressed, and as soon as Hector came home that night, I told him what I had experienced... He looked at me intently and said: ‘Well, what we’re going to do is give the families of scarce economic resources some vouchers so that they can buy the clothing their children need; so they can attend classes in the same, equal conditions as their classmates from more wealthy families’. The initiative for the Vouchers for School Clothing Program came about that very night.” (In Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 91)



O’Neill handing out welfare assistance to constituents. The photo’s caption reads: “Thousands of families of scarce resources have received vouchers for school clothing for their children, to the value of \$4.7 million” (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 116)

³⁴ Though a convoluted mechanism detailed in the biography, families participating in the New Housing Program can gain full ownership of the property for free so long as they remain there for a number of years. To 2008, 215 Guaynabo families had been housed by the program (Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 89).

However, paternalistic governance in Guaynabo fomented the dependency of the poor – 48% of the municipal population (Interview, Director of Federal Affairs, Guaynabo) - on the government through welfare provision. O'Neill's message for the poor of Guaynabo is that quality of life is to be achieved mainly, if not exclusively, through welfare. In effect, he accurately reproduces one of the key messages of hegemonic pro-statehood discourse: that decolonisation is largely about guaranteeing the social welfare of the poor according to US standards through increased government assistance (Romero-Barceló, 1978). Guaynabo's Director of Federal Affairs reflects on the consequences of this message - a dependency cycle that discourages work and is reproduced through the generations:

These programs are not bad, they're certainly sustaining families economically. The thing is, the way in which they're implementing these kinds of funds, they're not helping the families. They're creating a great dependence. And their sons and daughters, if they see their fathers don't work, and yet have money to spend, why do you have to work? We probably have families with 30, 35 years in these programs... You have to change their way of thinking before they can move out of that situation. (Interview, Director of Federal Affairs, Guaynabo)

O'Neill denies that his gestures towards the poor are in any way partisan or entangled with his status position, declaring that "need and suffering have no (political) colour" (in Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 59). However, his minority legislators think otherwise:

The people, as I told you, don't believe in themselves. And the [PNP] government takes charge of ensuring this. That's because it lives off maintaining them stupefied like that, so that it can carry on being the patron. So that when the elections come, it offers you work, positions, more *cupones*, more assistance... Well, that's why the people say, 'that suits me, I'm going for that'. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

My vision is that you have to give the people more participation [in government]. Make the people here less dependent. And he [the mayor] has made the people very dependent on the municipality. The participation of the people in decision-making

in communities is vital. Here, he cuts that off... If you're dependent, you're not free. I don't want people to bow before the mayor every time he passes by. (PDP legislator, Guaynabo)

The minority legislators contend that O'Neill's policies ultimately deepen the economic and psychological dependency relationships between citizen and state. This effect is emblematic of pro-statehood discourse. The PIP legislator goes further to contend that such dependencies reflect a colonial mentality that has prevailed all over the island as a result of its colonial status:

Essentially what influences us most is dependence. Because we have been used to the fact that decisions are taken outside of Puerto Rico, the important ones. That has made the people of our town very used to thinking, psychologically, that there is someone who is going to solve their problems, that they are going to be solved with economic contributions in some cases, with laws in others, and that our role is to simply receive and accept it. So we become dependent on those who govern us. Whether it's the feds, the state, or the municipality. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

By fomenting the dependency of residents on local government, the mayor effectively empowers himself, as their elected representative, to make decisions on their behalf without actively involving them in the decision-making process. This nurtures an authoritarian style of government in which residents are not consulted in the majority of decisions. An example of this would be the significant changes to the municipal built environment in the image of 'Guaynabo City'. Indeed, O'Neill betrays an aggressive governing style in the closing pages of his biography, under a section called "The Key to Success". In it, he reflects:

I am sure that the reason [for my success] lies in the way I never let myself be intimidated by the political cost of what I propose to do, because if it was like that, I wouldn't have done anything, out of fear or political insecurity. For me, fear and political insecurity are manifestations of the mediocrity of the human being. (In Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 146)

6.3.2 Caguas: participatory democracy

While it is possible to ascribe certain practices of politics in Caguas to the *soberanista* status position of its late mayor, it is also important to understand them as the international and global aspects of a decision-making model that is implemented locally, with specifically local goals. During his thirteen years as mayor of Caguas Miranda Marín oversaw the implementation of a new model of municipal administration known as ‘democratic governance’ (Rabell et al, 2007). Democratic governance is founded upon the principle of participatory democracy – the active participation of a citizenry in the decision-making processes of government. This achieves, in Miranda Marín’s (2009: 10) words, a “‘government-citizen symbiosis’, fostering a culture in which communities organise themselves to improve their quality of life with the assistance of the Administration”. Based upon a concept of governance as “a responsibility to be shared between the government and the people”, it requires “the active participation, not simply representation, of everyone who interacts in the City... to take the decisions, provide the services and realise the projects that collectively affect us” (Cantres Correa, 2007: 33). Significantly, Caguas therefore effects “a transition from a representative democratic system to a participatory democratic system” (Miranda Marín, in *Municipio Autónomo de Caguas*, 2005: 4).

Practically, the direct participation of citizens in decision-making is formalised through the municipality’s Department of Social Development and Self-Management.³⁵ “It is here”, as Miranda Torres (2010: 14) puts it, “that the model of democratic governance has its greatest expression”. This department encourages citizens to organise themselves into Residents Associations for the identification of specific issues requiring attention in their communities. These Associations then take part in weekly ‘Community Dialogues’ with city administrators, in which they can discuss these issues and even present their

³⁵ The stark contrast between governance styles in Caguas and Guaynabo is illustrated by the first actions of the respective mayors upon taking office. While O’Neill created the Department of Municipal Housing in Guaynabo in 1993, Miranda Marín founded the Department of Social Development and Self-Management in 1997.

own proposals for resolving them (Miranda Marín, 2009: 11). In this way, the citizens of Caguas become involved both in the identification of local problems and the implementation of solutions. For example, Residents' Associations (Figure 6.8) have participated in signage projects, administered recreational facilities, constructed community centres and public toilets for mobility-impaired residents, and organised schemes for the distribution of drinking water during hurricane season (Miranda Torres, 2010: 14). 188 of 216 communities identified by the Department have organised themselves in this way (Miranda Marin, 2009: 10). Many of the longer-term projects proposed by residents are written into the city's Strategic Plan, an important document that details all scheduled municipal developments in a six-year planning cycle. In Miranda Marín's words, "no other municipal government has reached this level of citizen participation" (2009: 11).

Conceptually, the model places emphasis on reversing the psychological and economic dependency of citizens on the government, as manifested by the "handout mentality"³⁶ of many Puerto Ricans (Miranda Marín, 2009: 10). Caguas understands such dependency to be the direct result of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States. As the city's magazine notes, "our creativity to develop collective projects has suffered from a syndrome of psychological and emotional impotence for the lack of confidence in ourselves" (*Caguas la Revista*, 2010: 20). Responding to this, democratic governance "precisely and fundamentally attacks dependency in all its forms, [such as] the loss of hope and frustration of citizens upon not feeling like the owners of their lives" (2010: 20). It proposes to "displace" the handout mentality "with a culture of entrepreneurs and ventures, thereby creating solidarity and a sense of belonging between neighbours... because they form part of the change" (Miranda Marin, 2009: 10).

The concepts and practices of participatory democracy might appear to be unrelated to the mayor's *soberanista* status position (section 6.2.2). However, both policies aim to decolonise Puerto Ricans – the former proposes a non-

³⁶My translation of the Puerto Rican word *asistencialismo*.

state-centric version and the latter a state-centric version. Caguas therefore produces effects that have implications for the current terms and significance of the status debate. Governance in the municipality reflects the very approach that is currently advocated by progressive intellectuals in English-speaking postcolonial Caribbean societies. Consensus has formed around participatory governance as a means of achieving decolonisation beyond the central state (Nettleford, 2003; Girvan, 2010; Meeks, 2003). These intellectuals note the potential of this model of decision-making to take concrete steps towards reversing the key colonial legacy that has endured, in multiple forms, *despite* the formal resolution of status issues in these islands: metropolitan dependency. In this vein Caguas represents a clear response to Girvan's (2010) call for an 'epistemic sovereignty' to break colonial ways of thinking, Nettleford's (2003) call for a partnership between government, the private sector and community to decolonise local political cultures, and Meek's (2003) call for the raising of national self-esteem as a basis for new local economic projects. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, it is therefore possible that the structures and practices of power in Caguas achieve postcolonial effects.



Figure 6.8: Caguas' participatory democracy. Miranda Marín with a Residents Association, during a community-led project to improve storm drainage. (Source: *Caguas la Revista*, 2007: 14)

Participatory democracy, as implemented in Caguas, represents a significant shift away from dominant practices of local Puerto Rican politics. Namely, it attempts to break the subservient power relationship that binds citizens to the state in the majority of municipalities. This relationship is captured by the Puerto Rican phrase *yo te doy, el otro te quita* ('what I give to you, the other would take away')³⁷ (*Caguas la Revista*, 2010: 5). Miranda Marín famously used the example of a broken door in a community centre to explain how democratic governance works (Figure 6.9). As he put it, "the citizens have to ask themselves, and answer, a fundamental question: 'what are we going to do for ourselves to solve our own problems and take charge of our own living conditions?'" (Miranda Marín, 2010: 6). This alternative discourse of empowerment and self-sufficiency contrasts directly with dominant approaches to local governance rooted in a dependency discourse – as manifested in Guaynabo (section 6.4.1 above) and Lares (6.2.3) – according to which "in the face of difficulties we complain from the passive position of the victim and wait for a saviour to take charge and rescue us from our suffering" (Miranda Marín, in *Caguas la Revista*, 2010: 5).

Figure 6.9: The broken door in the Caguas community centre

I remember that during my first election campaign, I visited a community with two groups in conflict. They had invited me to intervene. We met in the community centre and one of the leaders said: 'What's the municipality doing! We've spent three years asking them to send someone to fix the front door [of the centre], and they still haven't come'. And I replied with something perplexing: 'Come on, to repair a door you don't need to wait for the municipality to send out a brigade'. The leaders looked at me, confused. They were listening to a different discourse.

I didn't say, 'OK, I'll speak to the mayor and have someone sent out as soon as possible'. Rather, I asked them: 'How many welders and construction workers live in this community?' 'About forty', someone said. 'You must know two or three of them, right? Why don't you get a few of them together to repair the door one morning? I'll give you the paint if you like', I said. I came back a few weeks later and saw the door had been repaired. 'Did someone come from the municipality?' I asked them. 'No, we did what you suggested, and did it all ourselves', they said. They didn't even give me time to give them the paint. (Miranda Marín, 2008: 6)

³⁷ My translation. The phrase refers to a perception that the electorate compares local political candidates in terms of the direct benefits they offer to citizens. These could include welfare, government employment, or business contracts with the administration.

It is clear, therefore, that the practices of politics in Caguas and Guaynabo are based on fundamentally opposing principles. The psychological dependency of citizens on government that Miranda Marín attempts to contest is fomented by O'Neill in Guaynabo. While the former mayor believes in governing with the people, the latter believes in governing for the people, paternalistically providing citizens with financial assistance to alleviate their “need and suffering” (O'Neill, in Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 59). The anecdotes of O'Neill's wife in Guaynabo (Figure 6.7), and Miranda Marín in Caguas (Figure 6.9 above), illustrate this difference in emphasis.

A further key pillar of Caguas' model of democratic governance, alongside citizen participation, is culture (Miranda Torres, 2011: 4). Caguas' impressive investment in culture, as discussed in the last chapter, not only reflects the PDP's hegemonic position on Puerto Rican identity; it is also threaded into municipal governance more profoundly. Just as citizen participation is used as a mechanism to reduce the psychological and material dependency of citizens on the government, so culture is deployed to reduce these same forms of dependency on the United States. These two actions are interrelated, since the fortification of Puerto Rican national identity in Caguas - to the explicit exclusion of the United States - aims to boost Caguas' participatory democracy by raising residents' senses of individual self-esteem and collective belonging. A central aspect of Miranda Marín's vision of Puerto Rican national identity is its creative and productive potential to overcome metropolitan dependency. As such the Caguas model is founded on his belief that “the first and principal resource of a country or nation is its people... Without this, there is no country” (Miranda Marín, in Cantres Correa, 2007: 18). Indeed, Miranda Torres explained to me that a sense of national solidarity therefore forms the foundation for all of Caguas' projects: “building upon our recognition of the cultural values of *criollismo*, we formulate our strategic visions for democratising technology, human development, multisectoral alliances, sustainability and local economic development” (2011: 6).

Ultimately, the mobilisation of culture in Caguas' administration reflects Meeks' (2003) understanding of cultural decolonisation - a process that draws upon culture in ways that inspire new counter-hegemonic economic projects. Further, it acknowledges a heightened need to affirm cultural identity at a moment where the city looks to respond to globalisation – a process that it understands presents economic opportunities and cultural risks at the same time. As Caguas' Director of Culture explains, Puerto Ricanness is therefore strongly promoted to prevent the economic globalisation of the city from also effecting its cultural globalisation: "In this global world, creole identity, our national identity, is what keeps us together as a people so we're not... everything, right?" (Interview, Director of Culture, Caguas). Caguas' slogan *Nuestro Nuevo País* (Figure 6.10) is not, therefore, necessarily a pro-Commonwealth slogan linked to hegemonic PDP positions. Rather, it is a way of marketing the positive transformations of democratic governance while rooting Puerto Rican identity in place, at a moment where global change threatens the dislocation and deterritorialisation of identities (Appadurai, 1996).

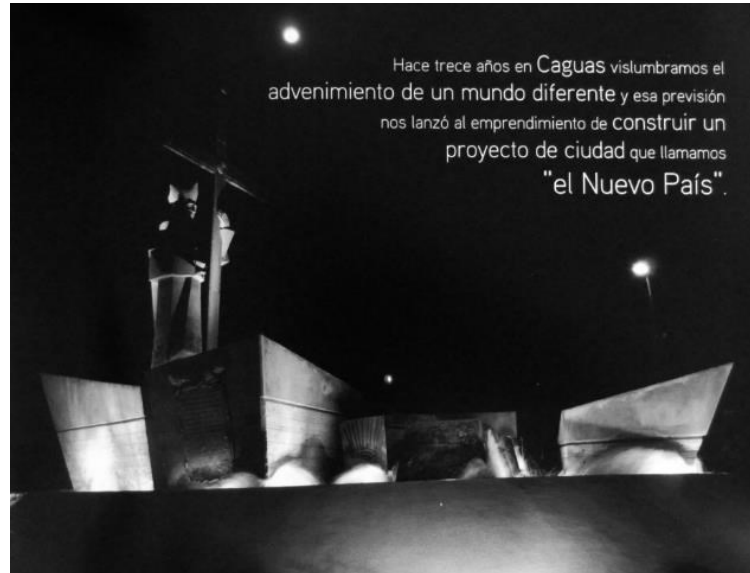


Figure 6.10: Back cover of Miranda Marín's 2009 address, featuring the image of the Monument to Spanish Heritage. It reads, "Thirteen years ago in Caguas we envisaged the coming of a different world, and that foresight launched us to construct a city project that we call "the New Country"." (Source: Miranda Marín, 2009)

6.3.3 *Lares: clientelism and partisanship*

As explained in section 6.2.3, the current status of Puerto Rico influences everyday political practice in Lares in that it ultimately sets the municipal budget. Given that it is mostly comprised of federal funds, a change in status - either statehood or independence - would have important repercussions for municipal finances. This said, the most significant ideology that presently informs the use of these funds is political clientelism. Political clientelism describes the "distribution of selective benefits to individuals or clearly defined groups in exchange for political support" (Hopkin, 2006: 2). As such, political practice in Lares manifests the strategies of politicians to hold on to state power within the current system rather than change it as per status positions.

Since government employment in Lares is high, clientelism is fundamental to its everyday political practices. The government is not only the largest single employer in Lares but also the largest employment sector (*Municipio Autónomo de Lares*, 2010). High government employment is typical of all Puerto Rican municipalities, but especially so of smaller ones. In the local context, therefore, Lares' government becomes the motor of the local economy and a powerful institution that controls a large proportion of its resources. This empowers the municipal chief executive - the mayor - to utilise these resources in ways that guarantee him continued electoral support. Governance in Lares is therefore strongly influenced by clientelist ideology - in particular, political patronage in government jobs. As Lares' PIP legislator explains:

The largest company here is the town hall. Employees in everything. [*Referring to the mayor*] So, if you don't keep those employees satisfied, you're going to lose your position. It's the employees that give you the votes. It's always tied to the vote. If I do this, I'm going to lose votes; if that, no. It's a constant balance between the vote and what I do. (PIP legislator, Lares)

The legislator suggests that the mayor feels as accountable to his own administrative staff as to the electorate, since high government employment means they are, to a degree, one and the same. This implies that the mayor's

decision-making is motivated as much by an obligation to protect his own staff as to govern according to other priorities. Such a possibility would certainly be consistent with his 2008 election campaign promise to raise the salaries of municipal employees – effectively a vote-buying strategy (see section 5.6 of the previous chapter).

Corruption is a noted trend of Latin American clientelism (Seligson, 2002). Indeed, the mayor's strong reliance on government workers for continued political support has fomented municipal corruption. During fieldwork a fraud scandal involving 70 municipal employees was exposed in Lares. They were accused of involvement in an organised scheme to defraud AFLAC, a US medical insurance provider (*Primera Hora*, 2011). The president of Lares' legislature explained to me how it happened:

L: I thought, what is he [mayor Pagán] going to do? He's got 87 employees being accused. And when I talked to him, he said Norma, I think these are good people. I don't think they did this out of the meanness of their hearts. I think they did this out of ignorance. AFLAC tells you, if you get burnt, you can claim. If a mosquito bites you, you can claim. So people forgot that you don't claim when you don't have these issues or accidents. And you know, because we're going through a difficult situation, I think people saw it as a way of getting money. And they're paying for it, they're paying for the policy, their insurance. And they forgot that you can't commit fraud...

So he [Pagán] says, I can't throw these employees out. I'm going to wait. If my governor says I have to, I have to. He's a very obedient man... What did he do? He took them [the accused], and moved them around.

C: So everyone is still working.

L: Everyone is still working. Those who were really close to him, about three or four, he moved to positions that were not to do with money. And I think that has gained him, just that one action, I think has secured him as mayor for the next four years.

The above dialogue shows that Lares' high government employment has had very negative consequences for governance, fomenting clientelism and protecting corruption. The president makes this abundantly clear with her belief that Pagán's refusal to discipline his employees will have guaranteed him victory in the 2012 election.³⁸

The importance of clientelism and partisanship to governance in Lares is further illustrated by the dynamic between municipal and central governments. Owing to partisan favouritism, municipalities that are controlled by the party exercising power centrally typically receive much larger amounts of federal funds from OCAM, to the loss of municipalities dominated by the opposition. As Lares' PDP legislator notes, Pagán therefore "has a distinct advantage":

He has senators and representatives that can help him. And he has all the government agencies, right? That helps you to do more works...³⁹ And when the other party wins [centrally], you can do less here. What happens right now is that the PDP mayors complain, that Fortuño doesn't help them. It depends on who's in power! (PDP legislator, Lares)

The fact that Lares receives its federal funds from the centre effectively maintains the power of decision-making at the centre. This is because the central government establishes how the funds are to be used:

When there are really big budgets to be distributed, for example, when Obama brought lots of federal funding for roads and for health, the representatives and senators [from the central legislature] come, and they tell us how it's going to benefit Lares. (PNP legislator, Lares)

Finally, it may be argued that Pagan's new town slogan *Lares, Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* ultimately represents the municipality's dependence upon federal funds and central government. As the previous chapter (section 5.6) explained, *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* was Pagan's personal tribute to God,

³⁸ Roberto Pagán was indeed re-elected as mayor that year.

³⁹ While I was unable to confirm during fieldwork how Pagán's *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* structures were paid for, it is very likely that he sourced the funding from an agreeable central government agency.

who had helped him govern the town by performing a miracle. Namely, God had provided exactly the \$300,000 he needed to raise the salaries of his municipal employees. This money reached Lares via CRIM, the office of central government that is responsible for tax collection in the small municipalities. Allegedly, CRIM had made years of accounting errors on the town. Given that Lares' economy is principally based on federally-funded government employment, most of the taxes collected by CRIM would be extracted from federally-funded economic activities. This would make the \$300,000 largely, if not mostly, federal funds. So, if Pagan's version of events is to be believed – that *Lares, Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* is a religious tribute to the missing \$300,000 – the slogan ultimately becomes a story of the town's deep dependence on federal funds and central government.

6.4 Entanglements of status in the municipal legislatures

This final section explores the relationship between status positions and the routine practices of the municipal legislatures. Specifically, it examines how status relates to the drafting, debate and passage of municipal ordinances and resolutions. This includes a consideration of the three mayors' decisions to name municipal space according to their status preferences, as discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, the Autonomous Municipalities Act states that executive decisions on place naming must be approved by the legislature "through a municipal ordinance" (OMB, 2012: 22).

6.4.1 Resolutions

Status positions are occasionally manifested in legislative resolutions. Resolutions often channel local political sentiment about political issues or events taking place beyond the municipality at the central or federal scales. In this way resolutions may be entangled with discourses around the status

question. As a PNP legislator in Guaynabo explained to me, "it's there that you'll see the political *background*⁴⁰ of each person":

For example, we presented a resolution criticising the expressions of ex-governor Rafael Hernández Colón regarding the status issue with Pierluisi's project in Congress [HR 2499].⁴¹ He tried to unwind the project, saying that the Puerto Rican woman gives birth in order to receive federal funds, that she is dependent on federal funds, and that she wants statehood for the federal funds more than anything else. Well, we understood that he denigrated the Puerto Rican woman... and obviously in that moment a debate was started. (PNP legislator, Guaynabo)

Guaynabo's legislative session on 24 February 2011 provides another salient example (*Gobierno Municipal Autónomo de Guaynabo*, 2011; see Appendix 10.9). Here status is seen to filter into and ultimately dominate discussion of an issue to which it bears no relation. Presented by "the Administration", Resolution 21 condemns a speech delivered in US Congress by Luis Gutiérrez, a Congressman of Puerto Rican descent. On 16 February 2011 Gutiérrez, who represents a district of Chicago with a large Puerto Rican community, used his time on the House floor to denounce the oppressive domestic policies of island governor Luis Fortuño. His speech brought Congressional attention to an unfolding "human rights and civil rights crisis" in Puerto Rico (Gutiérrez, 2011: 1). Specifically, Gutiérrez referred to the PNP's use of brutal police force to suppress the largest student strike in the history of UPR, and the attempts of a PNP-backed federal judge to weaken Puerto Rico's Law Association by imprisoning its president (Gutiérrez, 2011: 1). Guaynabo's Resolution 21 responds:

*TO EXPRESS OUR MOST ENERGETIC REJECTION AND
REPUDIATION OF THE MALICIOUS AND DAMAGING EXPRESSIONS
OF CONGRESSMAN LUIS GUTIÉRREZ WHO, USING HIS SEAT IN THE
FEDERAL HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, OFFENDED AND*

⁴⁰ As in the last chapter, I italicise any code-switching into English words by my Spanish-speaking interviewees.

⁴¹ HR2499 was Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi's 2010 Puerto Rico Democracy Act - an ultimately failed attempt to secure a federally sanctioned plebiscite on Puerto Rico.

HUMILIATED ALL PUERTO RICANS, TRYING TO DENIGRATE OUR PEOPLE (Gobierno Municipal Autónomo de Guaynabo, 2011: 7; italics in original)

This resolution indicates that Guaynabo, despite its full autonomy, remains obedient of central positions through expressing solidarity with the governor. It constitutes a local defence of the PNP's central power exercises against Gutiérrez, who had criticised them at the federal scale. Even so, debate on the resolution quickly descended into status politics. This is because Gutiérrez is both a US Congressman and a known supporter of Puerto Rican independence. Figure 6.11 below details a selection of passages from the debate, dominated by the pro-statehood majority legislators:

Figure 6.11: Debate in Guaynabo on Resolution 21

PNP legislator #1: The reason for this project is the negative message of this person, who calls himself a Congressman of the United States, elected under federal statutes and representing American citizens in Chicago, who says he is Puerto Rican, but lives from the benefits and goodness that make him an American citizen under statehood. It is the negative message that the enemies of American citizenship, the enemies of permanent union during these recent years, have tried to bring to the United States - to prevent the statehood movement from bringing their positive message about the goodness of statehood. (2011: 9)

PIP legislator: He lives and is elected in statehood. And in Puerto Rico, hypocritically, as the resolution very well states, he alleges to be an *independentista*... But I still recognise his right as a Representative to make his statements. (2011: 9)

PNP #2: He lobbies more for the rights of [Latino] immigrants than for the right of his Puerto Rican brothers to select their political destiny and have the same option and opportunity that he had when he made his personal plebiscite and decided to reside in Chicago. (2011: 12)

PNP #3: And the [Puerto Rico] Law Association, the leadership, they're anti-Americans that defend socialism and communism - that's what they do, and they want to bring independence through the back door.⁴² (2011: 15)

⁴² This is a translation of the Puerto Rican political phrase *traer la independencia por la cocina* - literally, to bring independence through the kitchen. It refers to the PNP's suspicion that Puerto Rican lawyers and intellectuals are constantly looking for ways to achieve Puerto Rican independence without holding a popular vote or plebiscite, because they know this option would lose.

Chapter 4 noted that the extreme polarisation of the three main parties around the status issue obscures the reality that they do not share coherent political views beyond it. The debate on Resolution 21 in Guaynabo would appear to manifest this. Status has become entangled with governance in a way that clearly reflects critiques about the predominance of status over understandings of politics and the political in Puerto Rico (Pabón, 2007: 69; Meléndez, 1991: 127; Hernandez Colón, 1998: 112). Figure 6.11 reveals how the hegemony of the status question has precluded a coherent, focused discussion of the topic at hand: whether Gutiérrez's specific expressions in Congress should be repudiated or were justified. The actual debate that took place did not consider the extent to which Puerto Rico was facing a "human and civil rights crisis" – the very accusation that Resolution 21 claimed had "offended and humiliated all Puerto Ricans" (2011: 7). Instead it resulted in a one-sided recital of hegemonic pro-statehood discourse.

It should be noted that municipal resolutions, and the debate around them, are ultimately inconsequential. Merely expressive in nature, they are unable to enact change over issues that go beyond the jurisdiction of the municipality. Moreover, resolutions form only a small proportion of all laws dealt with in the legislatures. Therefore, while the example above shows how municipal legislatures are known on occasion to become sites for the reproduction of status discourse, these moments would appear to be both infrequent and insignificant. This section now turns to consider the influence of status positions on ordinances, which constitute the vast majority of laws passed by the municipal legislatures.

6.4.2 Ordinances

Unlike resolutions, which are temporary and relate to issues, policies or events beyond the municipality, ordinances relate exclusively to the jurisdiction of the municipality and have "indefinite effectiveness" (OMB, 2012: 8). According to the Autonomous Municipalities Act, executive decisions on place

naming must be approved by the legislature through ordinances (OMB, 2012: 22). The previous chapter discussed the relationship of place naming in Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares to hegemonic status positions. It is therefore appropriate to briefly investigate the relationship between the municipal slogans and the municipal legislatures. The only slogan to have been approved in the municipal legislature was that of Caguas, making the slogans of Guaynabo and Lares technically illegal (Figure 6.12):

Figure 6.12: Town slogans and the municipal legislatures

Guaynabo City:

Guaynabo City? No, we never saw that here... But I would have opposed it, obviously. (PDP legislator)

It wasn't something planned where there was a staff meeting where Héctor said, 'from now we're calling it Guaynabo City'. (PNP legislator)

That came about as a result of an order I gave [to the municipal police department, redesigning the vehicles]. (Mayor)

Caguas, Nuestro Nuevo País:

Yes, *Nuestro Nuevo País* was approved, of course. After all, the slogan is in our municipality's mission statement... The Gateways to the City, the Botanical Garden, of course we had ordinances for that... They came from the mayors' office. (PDP legislator)

Lares, Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos:

No. That was not brought to us. No, we had no participation, neither the majority nor the minority, in the decision of that name. It was something basically administrative. (PNP legislator)

The PPD would never have approved this in the legislature, ever. Supposedly the money [to build the structures] was donated, but no-one knows who donated it. Not even the majority. (PDP legislator)

It cannot be that whoever gets into power, in this case the mayor, has the right to decide how the town shall be known. If I become mayor, I can decide that Lares is going to be the 'City of the Coca Cola Bottles'... Or, because I have a divine revelation, I can decide that now everyone must recognise the town as the 'City of the Open Skies'. (PIP legislator)

The slogans of Guaynabo and Lares were never legislated upon. These two cases therefore demonstrate the ultimate power that the mayors wield over both the executive and legislative wings of local government. In particular, the Lares case illustrates the practical impossibility that a local politician could ever challenge the decisions of a mayor. One of the minority PDP legislators drafted a resolution denouncing Pagán's slogan, but it was not even considered for debate in the legislature. The president of the legislature explains why:

L: My colleagues in the PDP brought a resolution to me, so I could present it in the session. And they included the mayor as part of the resolution... One of the statements was, 'we order Roberto Pagan to remove the lettering'... So I said OK, did you consult him? When you present resolutions, ordinance, you must consult the people you include to check they're in agreement with what you're saying... How can he be opposed to something he approved? So I told them, you did it wrong. You need to correct this and bring it back.

CE: Did they bring it back?

L: No, they never brought it back. (PNP legislator, Lares)

The president erroneously claims that the legislator was required to consult with the mayor in order to obtain his consent to denounce his slogan in a resolution. In reality she is protecting the mayor from being presented, even hypothetically, with a resolution for his signature that contradicts his own decision. All approved actions of the legislature must be signed by the mayor in order to gain effectiveness. This in practice restricts the actions of the legislature to approving the mayor's policies, precluding the possibility of challenges to them. The cases of Lares and Guaynabo therefore illustrate how Puerto Rico's mayors are able to exercise their absolute local political power to make decisions informed by individual concerns.

The majority of ordinances and resolutions dealt with by the municipal legislatures are not related to the status question. Indeed, the examples of its manifestation in resolutions (6.4.1 above) are exceptions to the rule – which is

that status positions rarely surface in the routine practices of the municipal legislatures. As the presidents of the Lares and Guaynabo legislatures explained to me, ordinances are never related to status, while its appearance in resolutions is rare:

L: You're asking if we've talked about statehood? No. We have not touched that issue...

CE: Or status in any wider sense.

L: No. Because what we do is approve laws, they're called *ordenanzas*, which have to do with the town and will benefit the people. They have to be included in the agenda to be discussed in the legislature. Even if I wanted to talk about something else, like status, I would have to say it off the record. We can't talk about anything that's not in this agenda. And basically, this agenda up to now, the only thing we've done is approve or discuss issues that are brought to us. Outside of that, we don't talk.

G: If our decisions are ever based on our [statehood] ideal? Is that what you're referring to?

CE: Yes.

G: I have to tell you that in the vast majority, no. I can't say 100%. What is to do with public politics, ordinances, to do with projects and legislation for the town? No. But in our case, distinct from the administration, the executive, we are a political body... So when we present resolutions, then you'll get to see partisan politics.

Here the presidents draw an important distinction between 'public politics' and 'partisan politics' in the legislature. Public politics relates specifically to ordinances – proposals for improving the town, solving problems and raising quality of life. By contrast, partisan politics is understood to relate to resolutions. As previously discussed, resolutions connect to partisan issues such as status exactly because they are extra-municipal in scope. This implies that the legislators believe that the practice of most public politics is non-

partisan. As such, a locally-focused public politics would have the potential to overcome partisan political issues, such as status, which only become relevant at greater scales. Because the presidents insist that the vast majority of their work deals with public politics over partisan politics, the status question is considered to be irrelevant to the municipal legislature:

That [status] is something that isn't even in our daily considerations. And I can tell you that as a member of a caucus of thirteen members of the same party, that before coming to the *floor*, we meet to discuss all the projects. And never, in the six years I've been here, has a project of public politics been discussed from a point of view of political status. Absolutely not. That I can guarantee you. (PNP legislator)

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the relationship between the structural dominance of the status question and everyday politics in three Puerto Rican municipalities. It considered the ways in which positions on the status question are entangled with specifically local priorities through exercises of power in the two key components of the municipal structure: the executive and the legislature. While the everyday politics of the municipal executives were found to be significantly entangled with status issues, the municipal legislatures were not, since the vast majority of decisions taken here were not affected by status positions. In the executives the mayors are seen to exercise their local powers according to ideologies and logics of decision-making that are not hegemonically dictated by status positions. However, that these practices and frameworks may, nonetheless, be traced to status positions indicates that the mayors exercise power ambiguously to thread local and central ideological positions together. The entangled performances of local state power create a complicated empirical terrain of effects that do not simply reproduce hegemonic status positions, but also contradict and subvert them in unexpected ways.

For example, in Guaynabo the executive strategies of gating and paternalism would appear to manifest pro-statehood discourse. However, attempts to emphasise the closeness of Puerto Rico to the United States bring into focus everyday resistances to federal state rules and problematic linguistic differences between the island and mainland. In Caguas, municipal practices might appear to reproduce certain aspects of hegemonic PDP discourse, such as cultural nationalism. However, the mayor has exercised decentralised powers to advance a *soberanista* status agenda that contends against the hegemonic status position of his own party, which defends the Commonwealth status quo. Moreover, Caguas shows that the exercise of fully decentralised political power has the potential to seriously complicate the status question itself by subverting its logics of central state building, possibly even achieving postcolonial effects beyond it. Lares is perhaps the municipality that is least entangled with status positions. Its everyday practices most clearly reflect the clientelistic strategies of administrators to hold on to state power within the current system rather than change it as per their status positions. Nonetheless, the status debate still holds some relevance here, since the prospect of any status change would have significant implications for public finances in a municipality that is so dependent on the central state. The significance of these findings for transforming the terms and significance of the status question is discussed in the next chapter.

7 The status of Puerto Rican status

7.1 Introduction

This final analysis chapter attempts to consider the potential of critique developed in Chapters Four, Five and Six – about status positions and their relationship to everyday politics – to transform the terms and significance of the Puerto Rican status question. The first two sections contend that practices of municipal politics in Puerto Rico mount conceptual and practical challenges to the salience of formal political status. Conceptually, everyday political work taking place in certain Puerto Rican municipalities subverts the ontological scales that constitute the status question. Namely, a debate that is (in its current framing) about central state building and the nation-state is fundamentally challenged by the processes of decentralisation and globalisation that are evident at the municipal scale. Practically, the performance of decentralised power in autonomous municipalities has created a series of effects that only a status resolution is supposed to make possible, according to dominant political discourses in Puerto Rico. These effects include sovereignty, elevated standards of living, and decolonisation. The chapter therefore suggests that practices of politics in the municipalities bring into view not the “question of status”, but rather, the “status of the question” (Negrón-Muntaner, 2007: 1).

The third section explores how municipal practices demonstrate the possibility of alternative paradigms for Puerto Rican politics, with the potential to ultimately displace the structural and discursive dominance of status. Specifically, municipal politics displays the possibilities of cross-partisan cooperation aimed at resolving everyday problems that impede the quality of life of Puerto Ricans in concrete local settings. The work that Puerto Rican politicians perform in pursuit of this goal - raising quality of life through local exercises of power - has gone ignored by the vast majority of literature on Puerto Rican politics, which prefers to focus on the status question. The fourth section discusses the political significance of these findings. Specifically, the entanglements of centrally prescribed status positions and local political

agendas that are evident in performances of local state power would suggest that status still matters, in spite of attempts to leave it behind. This said, municipal politics is adversely affected by numerous alternative forms of partisan political behaviour that do not relate to status directly, but rather, to other structural aspects of Puerto Rican political culture. The chapter therefore concludes that it is the resolution of these issues - not status - that represents the most immediate opportunity for improving Puerto Rican democracy.

7.2 Conceptual challenges to status: globalisation and decentralisation

The Puerto Rican municipalities are able to challenge the conceptual relevance of the status question by undermining the scalar unit upon which it is ontologically based: the central state. This takes place through the dual processes of globalisation and decentralisation. Chapter 4 explained how status is, ultimately, a question about nationalism and central state building. However, the possession of decentralised political power gives municipal actors the potential - should they choose to exercise it - to overcome the shortcomings of the central state by performing kinds of politics that go beyond it. In so doing municipal actors would in effect bypass the ontological scalar unit that is encased in all status positions – the central state – and thereby overcome, in theory, the status question itself. Autonomous municipalities possess power that asks serious questions of the political scale on which the status question is founded.

Caribbean nation-states presently face a series of 'existential threats' (Girvan, 2011) in the form of global economic, social, cultural and environmental pressures that undermine their viability and territorial integrity. Globalisation is broadly understood as a contemporary process involving a notable increase in the geographical scale, volume and velocity of transnational interactions (Held et al, 1999). These interactions undermine the viability and territorial integrity of the nation-state since they take place either fully beyond

it or with the significantly decreased intervention of the central state.

Government and national state sovereignty – in other words, the power to take decisions in a national territory - are therefore being rescaled in response to discourses of globalisation and neoliberalism in the region (Sheller, 2009). In this context the “persistent statism” (Newstead, 2009: 158) of Caribbean nation-states has been overcome, and the predominance of regional and transnational institutions over governance in the Caribbean has rendered independence “largely shambolic and economic sovereignty an illusion” (Girvan, 2011: 21).

In Puerto Rico, Pabón (2007) argues that globalisation renders the status question a ‘nonsense dilemma’ exactly because it challenges the tropes of national and state sovereignty that are fundamental to all status positions. Assuming a centred view of power (Allen, 2004), all aspire to strengthen the central state in one or another form (Picó, 2007). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Autonomous Municipalities Act assigns to the municipalities significant powers which, if exercised, challenge the central state by enabling direct policy responses to globalisation. The most important power in this regard is the power to establish municipal corporations, which are run with minimal interference from the central state. Caguas’ model of democratic governance was set up to harness these very powers to prepare the city for the globalised ‘knowledge economy’ with its municipal corporations INTECO and C3TEC. Indeed, two of the city’s most important executives are well aware that globalisation undermines state sovereignty:

In this new world order, cities, companies, non-governmental organisations and citizens are called upon to assume roles that had been assigned to States from the second decade of the 20th century. The city of Caguas understood this process many years ago, and changed the traditional way of doing things in government. (Miranda Marín, in *Municipio Autónomo de Caguas*, 2005: 4)

We see how countries configure themselves in economic blocs, delimiting internal aspects inherent to their national sovereignty in the name of new opportunities and the common good. (Jaime Morales, Director of Economic Development; in *Caguas la Revista*, 2010: 20)

The power of central states in the Caribbean is further brought into question by a growing consensus, in both independent and non-independent societies, of the pivotal role of decentralisation in governance practices (Benn and Hall, 2003). Decentralisation is considered an effective response to the broader, global crisis of the nation-state as a political unit (López Pumarejo, 1998). One symptom of this crisis, besides globalisation, is the decreasing responsiveness of central states to the “needs of the citizenry at the local level” (1998: 4). If this is the case, it is not clear, conceptually, how a recentralisation of the state as per a status resolution would improve the lives of Puerto Ricans in concrete settings. This doubt is seemingly confirmed by the experiences of poverty in formally postcolonial Caribbean societies (Grosfoguel, 1997: 70).

In Puerto Rico, the 1991 Autonomous Municipalities Act was passed as a direct challenge to the central state. As Chapters 5 and 6 indicated, its mandate of decentralisation has minimised the involvement of the central state in local affairs and granted mayors extensive powers over municipal space. For the same reason, the Act might also challenge the status question. Its author, former PDP governor Rafael Hernández Colón, notes that “central government no longer works efficiently. If guided by the principle of centralisation, no reorganisation of our government will restore effective government” (Hernández Colón, 2006a: 29). This is a veiled way of saying that the status question, which proposes a state-centric reorganisation of government, is a fundamentally flawed mechanism for solving the problems of Puerto Ricans. By comparison, the logic of decentralisation holds that people’s problems are best resolved from the scale at which they are experienced: the local. Executive directors in both Guaynabo and Caguas noted that the key to their achievements is the ability to bypass the central government in delivering services and solving problems:

With *El Nuevo País*... he [Miranda Marín] really wanted to distinguish Caguas, so that every time you hear that name, you know it’s Puerto Rico. You don’t say Caguas, Puerto Rico; you just say Caguas. In that way, I think he tried to make Caguas an example - that we could survive without the central government.

That was his intention... but it's difficult to do it. (Director, External Resources, Caguas)

Both mayors [O'Neill and Miranda Marín] fought the state. Because when you're a mayor and believe in what your city can do, and the people of your city can do, and you know you can do better work than the state, you will fight the state till the final drop. They both believed they could do better than the state. And they proved it. Because they said, we are here, and you are there. You are seeing the whole island as one. And you forget that there are some little things in the municipality that you can't deal with because you don't see it. You have to come over. (Director of Federal Affairs, Guaynabo)

Cities are pivotal actors in current discussions about the rescaling of sovereignty beyond central states in global and decentralised contexts (Leitner et al, 2007). Through decentralisation, Puerto Rico's largest cities have become new sites of power with international and global scope. The idea of the 'city-state' has gained currency in Caguas (Caguas la Revista, 2010: 20), where the administration envisages a municipality with sovereignty over its territory internally and the capacity to engage in international relations externally (Hansen, 2000). As indicated in the last chapter, Caguas participates in a series of international organisations of city and local governments, entirely without the involvement of the central state. The PDP Mayors' Association even has a detailed international relations policy⁴³, which includes the following points:

- To promote the Puerto Rican municipality in international, intergovernmental and municipal organisations, with the purpose of incentivising commercial exchange, attracting investment, tourism and international cooperation.
- To serve as a link between national and municipal foreign governments and the Puerto Rican municipality.
- To combat international isolation in Puerto Rico.
- To promote the principles of governmental decentralisation and municipal autonomy as a way to construct a more democratic

⁴³The PNP's rival Federation of Mayors does not have an international policy, and does not participate in international forums of local government. This is presumably because it is a pro-statehood body that looks principally to the United States for its external relations. Indeed the mayors of PNP-controlled cities with populations greater than 50,000 join the US Conference of Mayors. Héctor O'Neill is a member.

society in Puerto Rico and the world. 'A model of State and Government: the City State'. (*Asociación de Alcaldes*, 2013)

Conceptually, local autonomy presents cities with the power to conduct 'para-diplomacy' (Baldacchino, 2006: 860) involving separate representation in a variety of international and regional organisations. This potential is acknowledged by the incumbent president of the Mayors' Association, who states: "We look to encourage an international culture in Puerto Rico... It is the Puerto Rican municipality, and not the central government, that has assumed the role of internationalising the country" (*Asociación de Alcaldes*, 2011). However, it is not clear whether para-diplomacy contradicts, or compliments, the stated goals of *independentistas* and PDP *soberanistas* to achieve national sovereignty at the level of the central state. As Baldacchino (2006: 860) puts it, "in the world of island jurisdictions, para-diplomacy is one of the advantages of autonomy without sovereignty".

Cities are becoming increasingly responsible for coordinating policy responses to neoliberal globalisation. Leitner et al (2007: 2) contend that globalisation "has emphasised the supra- and subnational scales, 'hollowing out' the nation-state and making cities increasingly responsible for realising international competitiveness". The Caguas administration acknowledges this in its 2005-8 Strategic Plan, where it sets out a number of principal challenges for governance in terms of the failure of the central state to make Puerto Rico competitive and responsive to global change:

- The loss of the country's competitiveness, high electricity costs [set by the central state's public electricity corporation], and a costly and inefficient central government.
- A social culture that promotes dependence on government assistance.
- Uncertainty in the relation between central government and municipal government under possible political scenarios.
- The unpredictable events of globalisation. (*Municipio Autónomo de Caguas*, 2005: 10)

According to Miranda Torres, the city has displaced the central state as the optimal political unit for coordinating international responses to globalised

issues. In this view, cities and local governments now assume leading roles in international relations because “new global challenges, such as climate change and the crises of energy and food production” (Miranda Torres, 2011: 3) occur beyond the nation-state scale. Given that central states and nation-states have proven themselves unable to resolve these challenges, cities and local governments have risen to assume a “leading role in the coming together of nations” (Asociación de Alcaldes, 2013). The mayors of the PDP therefore believe that Puerto Rico’s international relations should leave behind issues of state sovereignty in favour of a better focus on strategies for local development and quality of life. Regarding the status question, Miranda Torres thus suggests that the city, not the central state, should become the principal unit for new discussion of political relations between Puerto Rico and the United States:

I think any change in political relations between the United States and Puerto Rico must depart from the recognition of local issues and be oriented towards achieving a democracy that is more direct and consistent with the people. (Miranda Torres, 2011: 8)

This highlights the importance, and possibility, of a shift in the focus and terms of current debate on Puerto Rican status. In essence, Miranda Torres argues that the discussion should move towards a much clearer understanding of the opportunities and risks of different ideas about reorganising the central state for cities, municipalities, communities and citizens.

7.3 Practical challenges to status: sovereignty effects, quality of life and decolonisation

The section above contended that the autonomous municipalities have the potential, through possessing decentralised power, to overcome the status question by working beyond the ontological scales that constitute it – the central state and nation-state. This section considers the implications of the decisions taken in certain municipalities to put these powers to practice. It contends that the actual exercise of decentralised power in Puerto Rico has

ironically created a series of performative effects that only a status resolution is supposed to make possible, according to dominant political discourses in Puerto Rico. These effects include national sovereignty, significant improvements to quality of life, and decolonisation. By appropriating and then realising many of the goals of the status question, municipal autonomy therefore mounts a serious challenge to the practical salience of status.

Newstead (2005) notes how nation-states of the English-speaking Caribbean perform and produce their national sovereignty through participation in international and regional agreements. In a global context of practically diminished national sovereignty, “these practices all work to imagine a sovereign state into existence and make it appear more real” (2005: 50). Likewise, consistent with its ‘city-state’ vision, Caguas has exercised municipal power to perform in practice one of the most salient effects of national sovereignty: international relations. Caguas’ mayor Miranda Torres explained this to me in emphatic terms, referring to decentralisation as a “key” that “opens a door to the world”:

We’ve made various alliances with countries at the international level – with Central America, North America, Brazil, Colombia, even the West, Spain, Israel, Germany. And then you realize that from your city, you’ve managed to do things that you weren’t able to do as a country! You found a key to open a door to the world, and the things that are a little more difficult for you to get as a country, well, as a city, we did it. With rice and willpower!
(Interview, Mayor, Caguas)

Ironically, according to *independentista* or even PDP *soberanista* status positions, this might problematise the imperative of realising these changes at the central scale. Miranda Marín argued before his party leadership that

[t]he scenario of globalisation and new global and regional tendencies point to the reality that the only viable, effective and potentially successful way for us to position ourselves as a prosperous, vibrant and productive nation, is to change our political condition. And that change corresponds inevitably to sovereignty... Political sovereignty is an indispensable tool for

returning to competitiveness. Within Commonwealth there is no space for that. (Miranda Marín, 2010: 2)

The enormous success of his model of democratic governance in Caguas complicates this argument. Namely, a change in Puerto Rico's political condition would not appear to be absolutely necessary to guarantee its prosperity and productivity, nor to respond to global economic challenges. This would especially be the case if the Caguas model were to be successfully reproduced in other parts of the island. The impressive achievements of Caguas appear to have been realised beyond, or in spite of, Puerto Rico's continued territorial condition as a Commonwealth of the United States.

The previous section noted that decentralisation has become a fundamental political tool for securing the wellbeing of Puerto Rican citizens. The status question might, therefore, be practically complicated by the power exercises of autonomous municipalities which have brought about significant improvements to quality of life within the framework of the existing relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. The effects of such power challenge the argument made by all advocates of status change that Puerto Rican problems can only be addressed effectively through the mechanism of the status question (Negrón-Muntaner, 2007: 15). Work performed in Guaynabo and Caguas questions the embedded assumption of Puerto Rican political discourse that the island's current status necessarily or absolutely limits the quality of life that its citizens can enjoy. These cities challenge the hegemonic view that a strengthening, or at least modification, of the central state is a precondition for improving the wellbeing of Puerto Ricans. As Duchesne Winter (2007: 94) puts it, "status change is not a sufficient condition for a profound social transformation, and it is not even clear that it might be a necessary condition". Power exercises in fully decentralised cities therefore have the potential to question the imperative of formal, state-centric decolonisation in Puerto Rico.

For example, Guaynabo has experienced impressive socioeconomic progress under Héctor O'Neill's governance. Its economic model, based upon

the construction and taxation of high-income housing and supporting commercial and retail services, has generated year-on-year trade surpluses and the second largest municipal budget in Puerto Rico. O'Neill proudly notes that this has been achieved in the context of an economic crisis at the level of central government:

When I offered my Budget Message in May 2008, I felt a sensation of triumph – the triumph of Guaynabo, not my own – upon announcing a budget for the fiscal year 2008-9 that had grown to \$141.8 million. That this had happened during moments in which the general economy of Puerto Rico and the Central Government confronted one of its worst economic crises of all time, must be considered a feat of public administration...

To have achieved it during moments in which the Central Government registered considerable reductions in tax collections, and basic services for the people, like education, health and housing were being limited, and the prices of products of greatest necessity, like water and electricity, suffered constant increases, was also a feat of public administration...

Today, looking back over the past, I reiterate something I have said before, and I say it now with much pride and humility: 'I always dreamed to see my town walk by its own efforts. But I never thought I'd be a part of that process.' (O'Neill, In Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 99)

O'Neill's evident pride at the achievements of his city in securing economic independence from the central government would appear to contradict his own self-deprecating assessment that Puerto Rico needs statehood centrally because "we don't have anything"⁴⁴. As discussed in the last chapter, O'Neill has used decentralised power to provide residents with a standard of living and services, in his view, "as if it were a state". It is significant that he has achieved this while Puerto Rico continues to be a Commonwealth. At the scale of Guaynabo, the provision of a quality of life to US standards might complicate the case for formally realising statehood at the centre, since certain

⁴⁴ See section 5.3, 'Guaynabo City'.

statehood effects have already been realised here. Caguas' PNP legislator provided an excellent summary of the statehood argument:

For us, *patria*⁴⁵ and freedom is that our children have rights. That they can vote in the elections every four years. That they have open schools, medicines, doctors in the hospitals, shoes, food, and a roof. The American flag gives us the right to have everything the Americans have. The American Dream. The true patria is the wellbeing of the family, of the people. (PNP legislator, Caguas)

Evidently, for statehooders decolonisation is largely about guaranteeing the social welfare of the poor according to US standards through increased government assistance. Given that the poor of Guaynabo are catered for in exactly this way by O'Neill's existing municipal welfare programs, it is possible to argue that they have been decolonised in practice according to one of the key criteria of hegemonic statehood discourse.

Remarkably, the outcomes of decentralised power exercises in Caguas are consistent with multiple new theories of decolonisation that have emerged from postcolonial experiences in the English-speaking Caribbean. The "mirage" (Ramphal, 2009: i) of formal state sovereignty has prompted searches for decolonisation beyond the state. Specifically, the endurance of multiple colonial legacies after formal independence has led to a proliferation of non-state-centric ideas about reversing the region's continued cultural, economic and epistemic dependency on the metropolitan world (Girvan, 2006). The model of democratic governance in Caguas presents a wealth of evidence to support these theories.

First, it responds to Girvan's (2010) call for an 'epistemic sovereignty' or mental decolonisation founded on a belief in the power of local ideas and action to break colonial systems of thought. In this regard Miranda Marín spoke of "active participation as antidotes to the venom of the welfare mentality, conformity and the colonised spirit" (Miranda Marín, 2009: 25-6). Second, its strong emphasis on national culture reflects Meeks' (2003: 176) and

⁴⁵*Patria* means 'homeland', 'motherland' or 'fatherland'. In the context of the status question it is mainly invoked by supporters of independence.

Nettleford's (1978: 61) understanding of cultural decolonisation as a means of fostering individual self-esteem, and belief in a collective self, as the basis for local economic development strategies to counter metropolitan dependency. Indeed, Miranda Torres explains that national solidarity forms the foundation for all of Caguas' projects: "building upon our recognition of the cultural values of *criollismo*, we formulate our strategic visions for democratising technology, human development, multisectoral alliances, sustainability and local economic development" (2011: 6).

Third, its emphasis on participation mirrors wider thoughts of Caribbean writers on decentralisation and participatory governance as optimal ways to decolonise political cultures. Miranda Marín's (2009: 10) attempt to "displace the handout mentality" of Puerto Ricans resonates with Gonsalves' (2003: 5) assessment that restructured, non-state-centric forms of governance overcome a situation where "the lowest common denominator of the people's instincts or inferior passions drive public discourse or public policy". Ultimately, Miranda Marín understood local participation as a form of freedom:

We do not promote dependence... On the contrary, we promote self-management, which for us is freedom – to give freedom to citizens; freedom of conscience because no opportunistic, corrupt politician can deceive a self-sufficient and free citizen. (Miranda Marín, 2010: 7)

The decision-making model in Caguas realises Nettleford's (2003) vision of a 'political culture of partnership' between government, private sector and communities. This, he contends, is the "way forward" for governance in Caribbean nation-states where the "statism" (2003: 589) associated with the socialist ideology of postwar decolonisation movements has given way since the 1990s to the deeper involvement of private and third sector actors in decision-making and development strategies. That Caguas has reached this same conclusion without first passing through a formal, island-wide status resolution might challenge the relevance of asking the status question at all.

The implementation of participatory democracy in Caguas appears to contrast with existing practices of participatory development in other parts of

the Caribbean - notably, Anglophone countries (Pelling, 1998; 1999; Pugh, 2003; 2006). These approaches have been criticised for their generic and context-neutral implementation, defined by a "narrow and limited discourse... [and] a reduced ability to reflect the true cultural diversity of the region" (Pugh and Potter, 2003: 17). By comparison, Caguas evidently places great conceptual emphasis on Puerto Rican national culture as the basis for local participatory strategies. While local and national political elites have, in Anglophone contexts, appropriated participatory discourses to build up and recentralise their own governing powers (Pelling, 1999; Pugh, 2006), a more in-depth study of Caguas' model of participatory democracy might investigate the possibility of a similar dynamic in Puerto Rico.

In appearance, however, developments in Caguas also match up with recent attempts by Puerto Rican intellectuals to theorise the island's decolonisation beyond traditional status politics. Caguas directly responds to Laó-Montes' (2008: 15) proposal for a "new politics of decolonisation" in which power is fluid and able to "link local, national and global processes". The exercise of decentralised power in Caguas joins the local in the form of participatory democracy, the national in terms of culture, and the global through measures geared towards securing neoliberal competitiveness. The city therefore resonates with Grosfoguel's (2008: 6) call for a move away from state-centric forms of decolonisation, which merely validate the aspirations of existing colonial elites to dominate positions in the new state apparatus, and Flores' (2000: 38) similar critique of the "obligatory teleology of state power" encased in dominant discourses of decolonisation.

In sum, the work performed in Caguas creates postcolonial effects. As Jacobs (1996: 161) explains, the postcolonial "is not so much about being beyond colonialism as about attending to the social and political processes that struggle against and work to unsettle the architecture of domination established through imperialism". Evidently, the model of democratic governance in Caguas is strongly geared towards the destabilisation, and reversal, of multiple aspects of metropolitan domination. Caguas appears to have found novel routes to

postcolonialism via non-state-centric decolonisation, in the process bypassing the status question and the hegemonic discourses that underpin it.

7.4 The parallel politics of Puerto Rico

The previous two sections have indicated that the Puerto Rican status question, in its present state-centric framing, is conceptually and practically challenged by exercises of power in the municipalities. This section expands upon one of the key conclusions of the previous chapter: that party political status positions are, to a degree, overcome in the everyday politics of the municipalities. While status is structurally dominant in Puerto Rican party politics, many of the political decisions taken in the municipalities studied do not appear to be affected by this structure. Rather, the everyday practices of municipal political decision-making bring into clearer focus the existence of a parallel paradigm for Puerto Rican politics – one based on cross-partisan cooperative efforts to solve everyday problems impeding the quality of life of Puerto Ricans in concrete settings. Following Negrón-Muntaner (2007: 14), this may be theorised as a “politics of small problems”. While a cause for optimism, it has gone ignored or unnoticed by the vast majority of literature on formal Puerto Rican politics, which instead focuses on the divisions of status.

Negrón-Muntaner’s (2007: 15) “politics of small problems” recognises the political agency of Puerto Ricans to organise themselves beyond dominant discourses in the pursuit of concrete political goals and improvements to daily life. A non-nationalist form of politics, it is about producing “more enabling narratives of self and community by seeing through the core assumption that political identities are based on national specificity or legal precedent” (2007: 13). It reflects Gil’s (1994: 102) earlier attempt to forge a new theory of Puerto Rican citizens whose capacity for political action is not limited to status options but framed, more crucially, by “recognisable interests in their more or less immediate perimeter”. “In other words”, Gil (1994: 102) explains, “mayors who are occupied with the sanitary condition of the community might gain more

votes than those that promise Liberty and National Sovereignty. Terms like independence, truth, sovereignty, statehood... have very probably lost their signifying capacity for our context of messages" (1994: 102).

A politics of small problems overcomes the status question by rejecting a state-centric account of power. "By invoking smallness", Negrón-Muntaner (2007: 15) explains, "I am ultimately parodying the still-dominant idea that only when the "big" problems of nation-building, state founding, and/or capitalist "development" are solved, will "the people" be liberated... A politics of small problems is the opposite of a traumatized politics based on national identity". Again this resonates with Gil's (1994) earlier critique of the status debate, which he argues is comprised of empty signifiers that do not connect to the material politics of everyday issues. Taking aim at the *independentista* discourse of national liberation, he argues that it creates a "discursive plug" that is "incompatible with the development of microfoundational and discrete strategies at a regional level (which must have specific, realisable, reachable ends, and offer a greater degree of equity and happiness in microcosmic settings)" (1994: 100). In his view, therefore, decentralisation is fundamental to a non-state-centric politics of small problems: "imagine, then, an administrative conception of power in terms of certain "places" that have to be covered, because the place of True Power, the national state, has been vacated" (1994: 100). In sum, there is a strong case for Puerto Rican intellectuals to take local politics seriously. In Gil's (1994: 102) view the "small problems, the daily, micro-foundational conflicts of life" actually present a "more difficult encounter" than the status question, exactly because they require a shift away from the discursive realm towards "delimited action within well-defined and contained parameters" (1994: 102).

Encouragingly, evidence from Guaynabo and Caguas would suggest that such politics is already taking place in the municipalities. First, there is broad acceptance that the status debate, in its present form, is currently stuck between partisan disagreements at the central scale and Congressional indifference at the federal scale – what Rivera Ortiz (2001) calls the *tranque*:

The people of Puerto Rico as a collective have become used to the fact that this doesn't have a solution. Because we've tried everything... armed struggle, civil disobedience, the electoral struggle, the vote, plebiscites, asking for plebiscites in US Congress... Everything has failed. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

The US just isn't interested. They say, *if it's not broken don't fix it*. (PDP legislator, Lares)

Status here, it doesn't appear much. Because each corner is aware that it will be resolved only when the leaders of our parties agree, and go to Congress together, to present their demands. (PDP legislator, Caguas)

However, accepting the dead-end of status, and the impossibility of resolving it from the municipal scale, frees up space for new forms of politics that do not exist at the central scale. Namely, the concrete setting of municipal politics provides a foundation for cross-partisan cooperative efforts to solve everyday problems impeding the quality of life of Puerto Ricans.

For example, minority parties often support the local ordinances and resolutions presented by the majority party. As Guaynabo's PIP legislator put it, "I vote in favour of 90% of the PNP's ordinances and resolutions, because they've appeared good. Or if not, then at least they don't damage the town." This tendency starkly contrasts with decision-making in the central legislature, where there is no tradition of bipartisan cooperation between majority and minority parties due to authoritarian party discipline and the caucus rule (Gándara-Sánchez, 2013: 2). Further, the primacy of quality of life issues in municipal politics is underscored by the phenomenon of mixed voting, whereby voters back different parties on their central and municipal ballots (Rivera Ortiz et al, 1991: 181). While the electorate tends to choose candidates on the central ballot according to their status preferences (Barreto, 2000a), local voting behaviour is driven by specifically local considerations – namely, the performance of the mayor:

At the municipal level, there aren't many issues relating to that difference [status preference]... In Guaynabo there's a lot of *crossover*, where many people at the philosophical level are PPD –

who want Puerto Rico to remain as it is - or are PIP – who want Puerto Rico to be independent – vote for their party's candidate at the state level, but at the municipal level, they vote for our mayor, from our party, who's spent 16 years in the city hall and has really served everyone equally well. (PNP legislator, Guaynabo)

Politics, everybody knows that we're statehooders. But Héctor's the mayor that gets the most *votos mixtos*. Because the moment you come through the front door on the first floor, and into any office, we have to give you services. Doesn't matter who you are or what you wish Puerto Rico was. You came here because you need something – maybe we can help you. (Director of Federal Affairs, Guaynabo)

There is, therefore, a belief among local executives and legislators that municipal politics transcends what is understood as 'partisan politics'. Partisan politics in Puerto Rico relates to strategic decision-making to secure party political gain and control within the existing system of government (Anderson, 1988). This should be understood as distinct from status politics, which corresponds to political positions about changing this system (Meléndez, 1991). Many interviewees in the municipal executives regarded public administration as non-partisan and focused on the 'common good':

In public politics, the mayor makes no distinction of 'I'm only going to help the people of my party'. If there's someone in need, or needs a service, it's provided without asking which party he belongs to. If we fail the streets, we fail all the streets of the community. We don't say, that street is PDP, let's leave it. No. In that sense, public politics at the municipal level has transcended the partisan politics that could exist. (Director of Planning, Guaynabo)

In the exercise of my responsibility, I will not take into account partisan colours nor ideological convictions, because need and pain have no colours. (O'Neill, in Quiñones Calderón, 2009: 130)

To me the best politics is a good job. If you do your job, well done, you're going to get the people's vote. (Director of Culture, Guaynabo)

Moreover, Pérez (2010: 26) notes that in Caguas that "it is no secret that statehooders as much as *independentistas* have benefited from the municipal

bonanza... There the line between PDPs, PNPs, autonomists and statehooders is almost imperceptible to issues such as the election of the mayor". Evidently, a 'politics of small problems' has the potential to transcend both partisan and status politics.

The potential of decentralised political power to challenge the dominant centred view of power in Puerto Rico is further illustrated by the bipartisan alliances and even friendships that have existed between mayors, who are responsible for administering the politics of small problems in different municipal territories. Notably, the mayors of Guaynabo and Caguas enjoyed a great friendship while they transformed their municipalities. O'Neill and Miranda Marín exchanged ideas for local governance, such as a municipal sales tax, and shared a strong belief in the principle of decentralisation, lobbying together for amendments to the Autonomous Municipalities Act in the central legislature. O'Neill and Miranda Marín were also the presidents of their respective partisan mayoral organisations, the Federation of Mayors and Association of Mayors. In a display of the salience of local power, they formed an important alliance that was instrumental in holding together a divided central government in 2004-08. This was split between a PNP-controlled legislature and a PDP-controlled executive. As O'Neill explains:

We were key, as much in governmental as legislative decisions, as much Willie as myself, in ensuring that this country could be run during those four years... Especially when they decided to shut the government down. We met together frequently, and put ourselves on the frontline to resolve the situation, until we got them to open again. We did what was best for the country first, before politics. But when the ideological [status] moment arrives, then I will be on one side, and the PDP on the other. (Mayor, Guaynabo)

7.5 The endurance of partisan politics in the municipalities

While the status question, status positions and partisanship are overcome to a degree in the municipalities, the latter continues to adversely

affect municipal politics in a handful of ways. While the politics of Caguas and Guaynabo demonstrate the possibility of cross-partisan consensus, it might therefore be overoptimistic to celebrate all municipalities as “beehives of democracy” (Hernández Colón, 2006a: 29). These problems – clientelism, authoritarian party leadership and continued centralism – are not directly related to status. Rather, they are manifestations of structural issues in Puerto Rican political culture that could be addressed through modest reforms. Given the continued deadlock of formal political status, the resolution of these issues might represent the most immediate opportunity for improving Puerto Rican democracy.

Despite the possibilities for transcending partisanship, the municipality remains a site of struggle for local political gain and control. For example, Caguas’ minority PNP legislator clearly indicated that her primary motivation in her position was not to serve for the wellbeing of the municipality or legislate in a cooperative spirit, but to oust the incumbent PDP administration:

Q: Could you explain to me, what is your vision for Caguas? What would you like to achieve for the municipality?

A: *[Responds instantly]* Get a PNP mayor in here, with PNP legislators. (PNP legislator, Caguas)

Similarly, some local decision-makers perceive that incumbent municipal administrations strategically manage their local political control by paying less attention to neighbourhoods that are identified as supporters of the rival party, thereby conserving resources for other projects:

A: I live in a middle-class area in Guaynabo. He [O’Neill] hasn’t done anything for the area where I live – I think they think there are lots of people from the PDP there. We’re trying to close off the area and get a gate. 90% of the community is in favour, but they won’t do it. So I have to go and put alarms up. People say he’s going to retire, but...

Q: I think he plans to go four more years.

A: I’m never going to get that gate! (Director of External Resources, Caguas)

As indicated in the last chapter, clientelistic practices are commonplace in municipal politics. A change of party in the mayor's office can result in far-reaching changes to municipal personnel (Rabell, 1993). Data collected in Lares suggested that local politics is particularly clientelistic in municipalities with very high government employment and low municipal autonomy. Unfortunately this describes the vast majority of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities, which are not formally autonomous and highly dependent on central government. Clientelism is also widespread in central government (Rivera Ortiz et al, 1991: 180). Arguably, the status question is therefore not transcended in non-autonomous municipalities, where the prospect of a bounty of federal funds to central offices under statehood, or their reduction or removal under a sovereign political status, would have important consequences for municipal budgets.

Municipal partisanship is further deepened by the implementation of strict party discipline. Municipal legislatures copy the central legislature in practicing the political institution of caucus (Cámara-Fuertes, 2009: 121). The municipal caucus is a meeting in which majority legislators join with the mayor to fix a blanket voting position on the laws to be presented. In practice the legislators rarely if ever defy the mayor's wishes. This stifles local democracy as the passage of any law requested or favoured by the mayor is all but guaranteed due to his or her automatic numerical advantage of loyal majority legislators. In this regard Lares' minority PDP legislator noted that the primary responsibility of a majority legislator is to "always defend the public politics of the leader above". Likewise, party discipline precludes the passage of any law that might challenge the mayor's position. For example, in February 2011 Guaynabo's minority PIP legislator presented a resolution to condemn the continued imprisonment of an *independentista* activist, Oscar Lopez, after 30 years of incarceration in the United States. However:

They [the PNP majority legislators] didn't even consider it. Because they know the mayor has to sign it later, and they wouldn't dare to vote in favour of it, for the mayor to say later, 'What's this! They're proposing something against what I believe!'

They know the resolution has merit as a humanitarian gesture. I understand that they didn't want to consider my resolution because they don't want to see themselves in the sad position of voting against something that they know is meritorious and about justice, simply because the mayor wouldn't want it, because the person in question is an *independentista* prisoner. (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

It may also be argued that partisanship is entrenched in the municipal political structure. Municipal legislators are not elected individually but rather in a general slate beneath the party candidate for mayor, who handpicks them (Picó, 2007: 27). In effect, therefore, the head of the executive has the power to dominate all municipal affairs, including those of the legislature. Moreover, by law majority legislators outnumber the minority typically by 11 to 3 (OMB, 2012: 49), making real cross-partisan decision-making only possible in situations where minority legislators agree unconditionally with the majority position. As Lares' minority PDP legislator put it:

As the minority, we can think what we want, but when we meet, it's 11 versus 3. To date, they haven't passed a single resolution that we've presented... But any project that the mayor of any town wants to present, his majority is going to approve it. Forget about it. There are very, very few municipalities where the majority is divided. We can oppose and argue, but when we vote, we lose. (PDP legislator, Lares)

Partisanship is crucial to the dynamic between municipal and central governments. This is commonly evident in municipalities where the mayor and majority legislators belong to the party that is not in power centrally. Reflecting on the case of Lares, the last chapter noted that this situation has profound effects for politics in municipalities with low autonomy and high dependence on central government support. The wrong party in power centrally can severely limit budgets municipally. Central government is also able to hinder projects in municipalities with maximum autonomy, such as Guaynabo and Caguas. This underscores the reality that autonomous municipalities are not fully

independent of central government, in spite of their budget surpluses and city-state visions.

For example, efforts in Guaynabo to construct new social housing were disrupted by the central PDP administration of 2004-8, since they conflicted with a national policy for 'special communities' pioneered by the then governor Silá Calderón (Interview, PNP legislator, Guaynabo). Likewise, Caguas' plan for a train line between the municipality and the San Juan metropolitan area was blocked by the 2008-12 PNP administration, which favoured a priority bus lane for reducing traffic congestion (Miranda Torres, 2010: 7). In sum, governance in Puerto Rico continues to be characterised by what the architect of the Autonomous Municipalities Act describes as a "centralist mentality" (Hernández Colón, 2006c: 25). As such, he argues that further powers should be secured for the municipalities through the enshrinement of the principle of decentralisation in the Puerto Rican Constitution (Hernández Colón, 2006b: 27).

Chapter 4 demonstrated that the status question is a structural filter through which all politics must necessarily pass. Significantly, therefore, confusion sometimes results when two politicians from different parties – who occupy fundamentally different status positions – come to agree on the same domestic or local issue. Ultimately, such confusion highlights the reality that the parties themselves do not clearly understand how they differ from one another in terms of political principles beyond status. For example, in February 2011 Guaynabo's PIP legislator voted in favour of all ordinances to expropriate the inhabitants of an informal settlement in the Amelia sector of Guaynabo. A full clearance of this coastal sector had been planned to make way for a waterfront development comprised of a mix of high-income and social housing (Gobierno Municipal Autónomo de Guaynabo, 2011: 7). However, the majority legislators struggled to understand how the minority legislator, through voting in favour of the project, was not abandoning his status position but rather expressing his agreement as to its social advantages:

They saw it as a contradiction. They said to me, 'hey, you're turning yourself into a statehooder!' So I had to explain to them,

'look, there are philosophical differences between us. But there are also philosophical differences between myself and other *independentistas*. Here I believe in quality of life. I don't become any less patriotic because I favour a course of action or policy of a statehooder. If it's right, it's right. If it isn't, it isn't! (PIP legislator, Guaynabo)

This passage importantly indicates how status positions still hold in routine municipal political practices - even in the context of decisions that would appear to have nothing to do with them. The fact that status issues are rarely if ever discussed *directly* in the routine practices of municipal politics (see the previous chapter) does not mean that status positions are irrelevant or fully transcended. Indeed, the entanglements of centrally prescribed status positions and local political agendas above suggests that status continues to matter, even if the elites themselves think it can be left behind.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Puerto Rican municipalities are sites of politics that transform the terms and significance of the Puerto Rican status question. To a degree, the municipalities are able to subvert issues of nationalism and central state-building in the pursuit of alternative political agendas which forge more direct connections to the material politics of everyday settings. Conceptually, autonomous municipalities challenge the relevance of status by problematising its ontological framing around the central state - a scale that is undermined by processes of decentralisation and globalisation. Practically, the exercise of decentralised power in autonomous municipalities has created a series of performative, unexpected effects that only a status resolution is supposed to make possible, according to dominant political discourses in Puerto Rico. By appropriating and then realising some of the purported goals of status, municipal power challenges the very salience of the question in practice. These effects - sovereignty, elevated standards of living and decolonisation - have been achieved while Puerto Rico continues, formally, to be a territory of the United States beneath Congressional sovereignty. This is

possible exactly because power is not simply held within a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate institutions, as per a centred view of power, but rather exercised in ways that enable decisions, and decision-makers, to cut across this hierarchy (Allen, 2004). In reality, therefore, such positive effects have been achieved *beyond* Puerto Rico's territorial status, and not within it.

Moreover, the (partial) overcoming of status presents opportunities for less divisive forms of political organisation and practice in local contexts. Optimistically, Caguas and Guaynabo demonstrate the possibility of a 'politics of small problems' with a material and everyday focus on quality of life issues. Such politics presents the opportunity for a significant shift in the current focus and terms of the status debate. The discussion, which at present is highly state-centric, would surely benefit from fresh proposals that more clearly articulate the opportunities, challenges and risks of different ideas about reorganising the central state for cities, municipalities, communities and citizens. Achieving a debate that is not state-centric but rather multiscalar – in other words, a dialogue that understands the importance and possibilities of local power – might ultimately lead to new forms of consensus to break the current deadlock of formal political status.

While certain municipal political practices appear to leave the status question behind, the entanglements of local political priorities and status positions that are evident in other moments would suggest that status does still matter. As such, performances of local state power in Puerto Rico have created a complicated empirical terrain of contradictory and varied effects vis-à-vis status. Further, while partisan political practices are partially overcome in the municipalities, they still take place and cause significant problems. Manifestations of partisan politics – clientelism, authoritarian party leadership and continued centralism – are not directly related to status positions or the status question. Rather, they reflect the more immediate struggles of political elites to dominate political power within the existing system. Indeed, the strength and significance of partisanship in Puerto Rico might lend support to intellectuals who suspect that its politicians are actually far less interested to

resolve the status question than they would claim (Pabón, 2007; Anderson, 1988). Partisanship reflects broader structural issues in Puerto Rican political culture which could be addressed through reform. Given the continued deadlock of formal political status, and pending a new consensus around fresh terms, the resolution of these issues might represent the most immediate opportunity for improving Puerto Rican democracy. Moreover, any attempt to counter institutional partisanship could only benefit the climate of status debate by encouraging more nonpartisan actors, such as communities, into the conversation.

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8 Conclusion

This thesis is about the power of Puerto Rican political elites to establish the framework of political discourse, and to thereby control political power, in Puerto Rico. Specifically, it has examined the processes through which the island's status question has come to determine this framework, and considered the ways in which it is reinforced, modified, resisted and even overcome through exercises of power in everyday political settings. Formal domestic politics is structured around three party political desires for an uncertain and unknowable postcolonial future, and not around any set of distinctive ideological positions for engaging with political issues in the present. The thesis has used the status question as a device to consider the relationship between hegemonic political discourses and political practice in Puerto Rico, specifically investigating the relationship between status positions and everyday politics. Driving this enquiry was an interest to search for new ways to move beyond the impasse, or *tranque*, at which Puerto Rican status politics has arrived. This began, necessarily, with an interrogation of the foundational concepts of the debate.

Chapter Two explained that the concepts of hegemony, discourse, performance and power are useful for understanding the Puerto Rican status question. It noted how most scholars of Puerto Rico have contributed to the hegemony of status by rooting it in a dichotomy of two related discourses - colonialism and nationalism. Moreover, it highlighted that the dominance of status has skewed understandings of the relationships between politics, scale and the state in Puerto Rico. Indeed, most writings assume a state-centric view of power that privileges the scales of nation, state and nation-state as the containers of politics. As such, it has become difficult to write about Puerto Rican politics without referencing, and reinforcing, the status question. Nonetheless, it was noted that the dominance of status has not, remarkably, been matched by empirical research into it. What does exist does nothing to challenge the framework that it sets, nor the power relations that its hegemony maintains. Indeed, that the literature has never thought to directly consider the

relationship between status positions and everyday political practice reveals the dominant and largely unchallenged position of status in most accounts of Puerto Rican politics.

This study has attempted to fill a number of research gaps in the existing literature. Progressive scholars of Puerto Rico have started to challenge the framework set by status through critiquing state-centric conceptions of political power and questioning the motives of the elites that construct and maintain it. Given that this exciting new work is mostly theoretical, the present thesis has attempted to provide some important empirical grounding. Further, it has aimed to contribute to the small body of comparative literature about politics in non-independent Caribbean societies. While this literature focuses on the continued salience of political status issues and state power, this thesis has called for new debate about the implications of debates about globalisation, decentralisation and the erosion of nation-state integrity for the relevance of the political status question itself. Similarly, it contributes to discussion in critical Caribbean geographies about the effects of rescaling state sovereignty on political space in the region.

Chapter Three argued that researching Puerto Rican politics presents significant epistemological challenges. Namely, most existing approaches prioritise status, and the related discourses of colonialism and nationalism, as the definitive ways of framing the politics and experiences of the Puerto Rican people. However, I attempted to approach Puerto Rico from a different mindset that would seek to interrogate, rather than uncritically foreground, the dominance of such discourses in order to develop a project that could work towards a new understanding of a currently deadlocked issue. An important part of this mindset was my positionality as an 'outsider' to Puerto Rico. A researcher from overseas, I favoured no one status option, and approached with caution the hegemonic elite and intellectual view that status necessarily eclipses all other politics on the island. More specifically, as a white British scholar I was positioned advantageously within a regional Caribbean mindset that facilitated my progress in practical and intellectual ways. Adopting an ethnographic

research strategy, involving extensive overseas fieldwork, cultural immersion and language learning, I arrived at a project to investigate the relationship between status positions and everyday politics in three municipalities: Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares.

To set up this investigation, the thesis first explained in Chapter Four that hegemony is evident in the Puerto Rican status question. The island's central political elites attempt to set status as the framework for political discourse by mobilising arguments – about colonialism, nationalism and state – with great persuasive power. Ultimately, the performance and circulation of these discourses is intended to protect the legitimacy of the mainstream parties by concealing their internal ideological contradictions and lack of future planning for any definitive status resolution. In Puerto Rico the status question is so hegemonic it obscures the reality that the parties themselves do not clearly understand how they differ from one another in terms of ideological principles beyond status. Moreover, status conceals their vested and immediate interests to dominate political power. Ironically, therefore, the elites use their stated wishes to change the system as discursive devices to dominate, and thereby reproduce, the *existing* system - and not necessarily to change it as per their status preferences. The evidence would suggest, in sum, that Puerto Rican political elites are substantially less interested to resolve the status question than they would publicly claim.

Having established that the status question was structurally dominant in Puerto Rican politics, the thesis then turned to examine the relationship between this dominance and everyday politics. Chapter Five presented three case study sites where local political elites had implemented material changes to the everyday, lived environment of the municipalities in order to bring into being and normalise discourses of Puerto Rican identity that were consistent with their status positions. These case studies demonstrated that the status question is not a predetermined aspect of Puerto Rican reality but rather constitutive of hegemonic discourses that are routinely brought into being and negotiated through performances in material space. However, the mayors in

each municipality strongly indicated that their power exercises – on the surface to do with status – were at the same time entangled with other local priorities not necessarily related to status positions.

Chapter Six therefore moved on to a deeper examination of the relationship between status positions and the structures and everyday practices of politics in these municipalities. This focus confirmed that the mayors in Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares exercise their powers according to a range of ideologies and local priorities, including neoliberalism, paternalism, globalisation, participatory governance and clientelism. Nonetheless, it noted that these strategies for local governance were still entangled with status positions through the routine practices of the municipal executives. Guaynabo, Caguas and Lares were therefore considered sites of ‘entanglements of power’ (Sharp et al, 2000) where local political agendas and centrally prescribed, hegemonic status positions were intractably knotted together through performances of local state power. Moreover, these entanglements were seen to create a complicated empirical terrain of effects that did not simply reproduce hegemonic status positions, but also contradict and subvert them in unexpected ways.

As such, Chapter Seven argued that the Puerto Rican municipalities are sites of politics that transform the terms and significance of the Puerto Rican status question. In both theory and practice, the municipalities have the potential to leave behind issues of nationalism and central state building in the pursuit of alternative political agendas that forge more direct connections to the material politics of everyday settings. Conceptually, autonomous municipalities challenge the relevance of status by problematising its ontological framing around the central state - a scale that is cut across by the processes of decentralisation and globalisation. Practically, the exercise of decentralised power in autonomous municipalities has created a series of effects that only a status resolution is supposed to make possible, according to dominant political discourses in Puerto Rico. These effects - sovereignty, elevated standards of living and decolonisation - have been achieved while Puerto Rico continues,

formally, to be a territory of the United States beneath Congressional sovereignty. This is possible exactly because power is not simply held within a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate institutions, as per a centred view of power, but rather exercised in ways that enable individual and group actors to cut across this hierarchy (Allen, 2004). In reality, therefore, such effects have been achieved *beyond* Puerto Rico's territorial status, and not within it. Perhaps one of the main reasons that Puerto Rico is currently stuck on the status question is that it is stuck on a centred view of power. However, political practices in the municipalities clearly demonstrate that it is false to assume Puerto Ricans "live in a world of crushing systems that can stamp on all expectation" (Thrift, 2000a: 274).

Remarkably, the outcomes of decentralised power exercises in Caguas are consistent with multiple new theories of decolonisation that have emerged from postcolonial experiences in the English-speaking Caribbean. Caguas has found novel routes to postcolonialism via non-state-centric decolonisation, in the process bypassing the status question and the hegemonic discourses that underpin it. Suggesting that Caguas is 'postcolonial' might jar with the views of many Puerto Ricans who read this thesis. Postcolonial ideas have been rejected outright as inapplicable to an island that continues, formally, as a colony (see, for example, Lugo-Lugo, 2006). The author is aware that he makes the above suggestion in a thesis which does not recommend an immediate and definitive solution to the status question according to the familiar mould of options. As such, he is also aware that his thesis risks becoming the latest study to receive the condemnation of Puerto Rico's academic and political establishment as politically paralysing work by an Anglosaxon on the island. According to this logic, any work that fails to explicitly advocate the end of US colonialism (as hegemonically understood) ultimately reinforces Puerto Rico's colonial status quo and defends colonialism by principle. However, this project has been driven by an aim to investigate whether formal politics in Puerto Rico takes place in ways that cannot be fully encapsulated by these hegemonic, and

essentially colonial, ways of thinking. The dominance of status in Puerto Rico precludes the ability of most elites to see things in a different way.

This thesis has not, therefore, attempted to solve the status dilemma for Puerto Ricans. The author hopes to have avoided reproducing the dominant narrative of Anglo-American researchers who enter Caribbean and Latin American fields in order to advise “beleaguered others” (Sletto and Kingsbury, 2005: 13). More modestly, the thesis has set out to advance new ideas about how the *tranque*, or dead-end, of Puerto Rican status politics might be overcome. In this regard it recommends no status option, nor indeed any immediate status change, but rather modest reforms to Puerto Rico’s existing representative democracy. These reforms should aim to undermine the institutional practices of partisanship that adversely affect island politics, and stimulate non-nationalist forms of political action and organisation. This might involve encouraging the establishment of new parties, increasing the accountability of decision-makers to citizens, or taking seriously expressions of political agency informed by clear ideological principles beyond status. Structural improvements to Puerto Rican democracy in the short and medium term might gradually break the monopoly of the mainstream parties over the status question and encourage more nonpartisan actors, such as communities, into the conversation.

Two new status-neutral parties were recently founded in Puerto Rico. However, the struggles of the Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico Party (PPR) and Working People’s Party (PPT) to find an electoral footing in 2008 and 2012 demonstrates the difficulty of breaking the entrenched hegemony of status in practice. Pending reforms, the non-nationalist ‘politics of small problems’ articulated in the municipalities might suggest the possibility of a useful shift in the current terms of the status debate. The presently state-centric discussion would benefit from fresh proposals that more clearly articulate the opportunities, challenges and risks of different ideas about reorganising the central state for cities, municipalities, communities and citizens. Achieving a

debate that is not state-centric, but rather multiscalar, could ultimately lead to a new consensus on status beyond deadlocked partisan positions.

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10 Appendix

10.1 Plain language statement for interviewees

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Mr Christopher Ellis (postgraduate researcher)

PhD candidate

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PhD thesis: The Puerto Rican status question

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral thesis research about the impact of the Puerto Rican status debate on municipal politics. You have been selected to participate as a political figure or senior civil servant in one of the three municipalities that are of interest to me. The research aims to assess the real-world importance of the status issue using these municipal case studies.

The research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Geosciences, and is funded by the UK government-funded Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Please note that I am in Puerto Rico as an independent researcher with no affiliation to any political party or law enforcement agency.

What will I be asked to do?

Should you agree to participate, I would like you to interview you. The exact length of the interview shall depend on your availability, but should not be more than 50 minutes. With your permission, the interview shall be recorded with an mp3 voice recorder so that I can have an accurate record of what you say. The conversation shall then be transcribed.

How will my anonymity and confidentiality be protected?

Data collected in the interview is for research purposes. You shall be asked if you would prefer to remain anonymous in the interview transcription; if so, your request shall be honoured. However, in accordance with the guidelines on anonymity in the British Sociological Association's Statement of

Ethical Practice (2002), please note that as a public figure it may not be possible to disguise your identity completely.

I shall provide you upon request with copies of the voice recording and / or transcript at a later date. You are then free to request the removal of any part of the conversation. I guarantee you confidentiality in respect of this information. However, I do have an ethical duty as a researcher to report evidence of serious crime, such as abuse of individuals under the age of 18, to the police.

How will I receive feedback?

When my thesis has been completed, a brief summary of the findings shall be made available to you on request via email. It is also likely that I shall present the results at academic conferences in Puerto Rico and overseas, and write articles in academic journals.

Right to withdrawal

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

Where can I get further information?

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my supervisor. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Ethics Committee of the School of Geosciences, University of Edinburgh, at ethics@geos.ed.ac.uk.

How do I agree to participate?

You can agree to participate by contacting me via email or telephone, or by simple verbal consent when we meet. By agreeing to participate you confirm that you have read and understood this information.

Thank you for your time.

Christopher Ellis

10.2 Letter of introduction from the Institute of Caribbean Studies, UPR

Universidad de
Puerto Rico



Recinto de
Rio Piedras

1ro de febrero de 2011

A QUIEN PUEDA INTERESAR

Sirva la presente para certificar que el estudiante graduado en Ciencia Política, Chris Ellis, de la University of Edinburgh, está afiliado al Instituto de Estudios del Caribe como Investigador Visitante durante el año lectivo 2010-2011.

Durante este periodo realizará investigación para su tesis doctoral en Puerto Rico y le solicitamos que por favor le brinden toda la colaboración que les sea posible.

Nos despedimos con un saludo cordial y estamos a su disposición de necesitar mayor información.

Atentamente,

Instituto de
Estudios del Caribe

Institute of
Caribbean Studies

Institute d'Etude
de la Caraïbe

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10.3 Interview schedules

Pilot work with central politicians

Questions around the following key themes:

1. *Formal political structure (status discourse)*
2. *Party political practice (everyday action)*
3. *Relation of formal political structure to political practice*

Introduction

Briefly about myself – I am a postgraduate research student from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and am completing a thesis on contemporary status politics in Puerto Rico. Before we begin, I would like to show you this plain language statement, which outlines who I am, what I'm doing, and how I hope to use the information from our conversation.

- Would you prefer that we talk in Spanish or English?
- Do I have your consent to proceed?
- May I record the interview?

Thank you.

Warm-up questions

-[If interviewee was elected] Congratulations for your electoral success - why do you think the public voted for you? [If not] Could you explain why you think Puerto Ricans should vote for your party?

(Is a vote for your party a vote for your domestic policies, the personalities of your candidates, your status position?)

-What do you think are the day-to-day concerns of the Puerto Rican people?

-Could you offer me your opinion on Pedro Pierluisi's HR2499 plebiscite proposal in Congress?

1. Formal political structure (status discourse)

-Can you explain why independence / statehood / commonwealth represents the best future for Puerto Rico?

-Why are you in disagreement with the other two status options?

-How likely do you think it is that Puerto Rico will become independent / the 51st state / achieve enhancements to commonwealth? (What do you perceive are the barriers to the achievement of this status?)

-Can you explain how independence / statehood / enhanced commonwealth shall improve the quality of life of Puerto Ricans?

-What do all members of your party have in common ideologically other than a status preference? (For example, how are your social or economic policies different from those of the other parties?)

2. Party political practice (everyday action)

-Could you tell me about the work you perform as a legislator / party leader?

-How do you divide your time between these activities?

-[Follow-up questions based upon information given to add depth]

3. Relation of political structure to political practice (translation of status desire into action)

-What provisions has the party made for the achievement of statehood/independence/improvements to the Commonwealth? (What is the party doing at the moment towards the aim of achieving statehood/independence/Commonwealth?)

-What happens to your party once independence / statehood / enhanced commonwealth is achieved? Have you thought about this?

-Could you give me an idea of how often the status issue appears in your everyday work? (How does it appear?)

-Do you think your position on status affects the decisions you make as a central legislator / party leader?

Warm-down question

-Thank you very much for your time. Is there anything else you would like to mention that you think is of relevance to my study?

Main study with municipal elites (political and bureaucratic)

Questions around the following key themes:

1. *Formal political structure (status discourse)*
2. *Local political practice (everyday action)*
3. *Relation of formal political structure to local political practice (municipal identity)*

Introduction

Briefly about myself – I am a postgraduate research student from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and am completing a thesis on contemporary status politics in Puerto Rico. I am interested in how the status question may influence municipal governance and identity. Before we begin, I would like to show you this plain language statement, which outlines who I am, what I'm doing, and how I hope to use the information from our conversation.

- Would you prefer that we talk in Spanish or English?
- Do I have your consent to proceed?
- May I record the interview?

Thank you.

Warm-up questions

- [For politicians / Mayor] Congratulations for your local electoral success - why do you think the public voted for you?
- [For all] How did you get involved in local politics / the local administration?

1. Formal political structure (status discourse)

[These questions are for politicians only, as civil service directors are not necessarily affiliated to the party in power]

- Can you explain why independence / statehood / commonwealth represents the best future for Puerto Rico?
- Why are you in disagreement with the other two status options?
- Aside from your position on status, what political views define and unify your party? (For example, how are your social or economic policies different from those of the other parties?)

2. Local political practice (everyday action)

-Could you tell me about your role in local government? (What does your position involve?)

-What are the key political issues in the municipality?

-What do you think are the day-to-day concerns of your constituents? (Could you tell me a little about how you are dealing with them?)

-When disagreements occur between yourself and other decision makers in the municipality, what are the disagreements usually about? (What sorts of issues cause disagreement, and why? Can you think of any examples?)

3. Relation of central structural politics to local political practice (municipal identity)

-[Mayor] What is your vision for the municipality? / [All others] What do you understand as the mayors' vision for the municipality?

-What does it mean to be *Guaynabeño* / *Cagueño* / *Lareño*?

-Could you explain to me the meaning of *Guaynabo City* / *El Nuevo País de Caguas* / *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos*? What do you understand to be the meaning of the other two city slogans?

-Can you tell me anything about how *Guaynabo City* / *El Nuevo País de Caguas* / *Ciudad de los Cielos Abiertos* came to be?

-Do you perceive that these slogans are related to the status question? (If so, how?)

-Can you think of any ways in which the status issue has appeared during your day-to-day work in the municipality? (Can you think of any examples where national status issues affected local decisions or events in the municipality? If so, could you explain what happened, and how?)

-[Politicians] Do you think your own position on status informs the decisions you make in the municipality?

-[Minority legislators and civil servants] Do you perceive that the status preference of the mayor and majority legislators has an effect on the work they perform in the municipality? (I.e., do you see local status biases that the majority party cannot, or would deny?)

Warm-down Thank you very much for your time. Is there anything else you would like to mention that you think is of relevance to my study?

10.4 Sample interview transcript (Spanish)

Andrés Rodríguez Rivera, PIP Guaynabo, 17 February 2011

CE: ¿Me puede explicar un poco sobre su papel en el gobierno municipal, y en el proceso de la toma de decisiones?

AR: Pues mira, nuestro papel, como tú sabes somos minoría, en mi caso, somos minoría de uno, lo que quiere decir que yo dependo a uno de la oposición, ya sea del partido de la mayoría, o del segundo partido, para si quiera presentar una moción, porque si presento una moción, y esta moción no la secunda nadie, allí muere. Ni siquiera va a la votación.

Por tal razón, ser minoría de uno, te impone que tú por lo menos tengas que consultar por lo menos un legislador de los otros bandos para ver si presentas una moción, pueden apoyar, o por lo menos será considerada. Pero aún así, tenemos un rol importante de fiscalización, porque aunque cierto es que ellos pueden aprobar todos sus proyectos sin nuestros votos, porque no hace diferencia en términos prácticos reales, lo cierto es que un voto a favor nuestro, es una medida yo presiento es, en cierto modo, un endoso de que la oposición acepta y esta de acuerdo con lo que se está presentando.

Por ejemplo, si yo voto en contra, como quiera medida que será aprobada, si es que sea el caso, pero, ellos van a tener que convencerme quizás, si voto a favor o no a favor. Tengo la opción de denunciar fuera del hemiciclo, que no pongo el proyecto, cuáles son las razones por la que entiendo ese proyecto no debió aprobarse, y puedo convocar a una conferencia de prensa, y llevarme el mensaje mas allá de las paredes del hemiciclo. En ese sentido, yo veo la gran importancia a que la minoría ... si son muchas o pocas, estén presentes. Y participen del debate, del dialogo, para llevar el mensaje más alla del grupo de legisladores. Cosas que cada vez que ellos vayan a tornar (tomar) una decisión, por lo menos tenga una impresion que hay alguien que puede llevar mas alla el mensaje, de que se aprobó algo que no debió aprobarse, o que se rechazó algo que debió aprobarse.

En ese sentido yo veo mi función de gran importancia aún cuando sea una persona.

CE: ¿Y cuales son los claves issues, o temas politicos en este municipio?

AR: Bueno, es distinto cuando tú estás en en la legislatura estatal, y en la legislatura municipal. Porque en la legislatura estatal, los temas que se tocan son temas que cubren toda la isla, inclusive el estatus. La legislatura municipal basicamente lo que hacemos, es uno, fiscalizar al gobierno municipal, y segundo, hacer aportaciones para que se forme en parte de la ley en el municipio. No podemos ir mas alla de eso. Claro tambien que podemos hacer planteamientos, que aunque no apliquen al resto del pais, pero que lleven un mensaje.

10.5 Sample interview transcript (English)

Wednesday 19 August 2009, 3.20-4pm. Department of State, Old San Juan. Interviewee: Mr Kenneth McClintock, Puerto Rican Secretary of State. New Progressive Party (pro-statehood).

CE: To tell you a little bit about myself, I'm a postgraduate in human geography, and I'm, I'm fascinated by Puerto Rico's status question, and I'm interested to think about some of the reasons why the status question is still an open question,

KM: Yep.

CE: why it keeps getting returned to. Er... I'm also interested in the way it's portrayed in the public sphere, through political institutions, cultural institutions, the radio, newspapers, even education systems as well. So, that's what I'm interested in, I'm an early stage researcher, but that's where I'm coming from at the moment. So firstly, I'd like to congratulate you and your party's success in -

KM: Er, one second, one moment. It's a reporter, I got to... Bob? Hi. Yeah, I'm here.

[interrupted by ten-minute press call]

CE: Where were we... I was saying before that... Yes, congratulations to your party on its recent successes in the gubernatorial elections at the end of last year. Why do you think the NPP won by such a landslide?

KM: Well, I think we won basically because of two issues. One of them is the condition of the economy, and the fact that the past administration really contributed to creating the problem rather than being part of the solution. Er, you know, the recession in PR began in March of 2006 long before the national recession began. Is the first time in history that a local recession begins before the national recession has begun. Er, They closed down the government for 2 weeks in May of 2006. It was done more as a... as a pressure... tactic, it wasn't necessary to do so, it did not save any money to do so, but it had the effect of reducing the... the level of... of confidence people that had in our government and in the economy as such. Uh, the second big issue was political status, er, although a vote for our party was not necessarily a vote for statehood, but we made full use of the fact that the past administration for the past 8 years had been trying to separate PR from the rest of the nation, er, had... were using er... arguments that PR should... draw farther away from the rest of the nation ... and the truth is the immense majority of PR want to maintain or increase the closeness between PR and the US. And we took advantage of that electorally.

10.6 Vota “No” y Puerto Rico gana

VOTA “NO” Y PUERTO RICO GANA



Rubén Berríos Martínez

La consulta de estatus a celebrarse el 6 de noviembre iniciará un proceso que abrirá las puertas a nuestra descolonización. Luego del plebiscito se podrá hablar de un antes y un después en la política puertorriqueña.

I. La colonia es el problema

En pleno siglo 21, cuando el mundo entero se ha liberado del colonialismo, Puerto Rico sigue siendo colonia. La condición colonial es, por definición, antidemocrática porque el pueblo no puede tomar las decisiones básicas que le afectan. En Puerto Rico la colonia es también la raíz de muchos de nuestros más graves problemas económicos y sociales porque carecemos de los poderes que necesitamos para desarrollarnos plenamente.

Puerto Rico todavía es colonia porque esa ha sido la voluntad de los Estados Unidos. Si no fuera así, ya no lo seríamos. Para descolonizar nuestra patria es necesario crearle a los Estados Unidos una crisis política que los mueva a atender y resolver el problema colonial puertorriqueño. De eso precisamente se trata la próxima consulta de estatus que en su esencia hemos impulsado por años.

II. Plebiscito para la descolonización

El plebiscito consiste de dos preguntas en una misma papeleta. En la primera decidiremos si estamos de acuerdo (Sí o NO) en “mantener la condición política territorial actual”. En la segunda podremos optar entre la independencia, la estadidad o el ELA soberano. La primera pregunta es fundamental. Una votación única en nuestra historia. Es un cañón apuntado al corazón de la colonia. Por primera vez en 114 años, todos los que nos oponemos al actual estatus territorial tendremos la oportunidad de reclamar juntos el fin del coloniaje.

Los independentistas, los estadistas y los populares que postulan un ELA no colonial y no territorial -a quienes somos la mayoría amplia del electorado- votaremos NO a la colonia. Así todos ganamos y Puerto Rico gana.

El voto por el NO le pondrá fin a la teoría del colonialismo por consentimiento que es la excusa norteamericana para la inacción. El rechazo de nuestro pueblo a la colonia es, en las actuales circunstancias, el más efectivo instrumento de presión, viable y disponible, para crearle a Estados Unidos una crisis política que obligue a esa nación a enfrentar su

PAPELETA OFICIAL
OFFICIAL BALLOT

CONSULTA
PLEBISCITE

CONSULTA SOBRE EL ESTATUS POLÍTICO DE PUERTO RICO
PLEBISCITE ON PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS

Indicaciones: Marque la opción de su preferencia. La papeleta con más de una (1) opción marcada de voto sufre de una nulidad total.
(Esta está de acuerdo con mantener la condición política territorial actual?)
Instrucciones: Mark your option of preference. Please indicate only one (1) option marked on this ballot. If more than one (1) option is marked, the ballot is null and void.

Sí / Yes No / No

Independencia
Estadidad
Estado Libre Asociado Soberano

Estadidad: Prefiero que Puerto Rico sea un estado de Estados Unidos, lo que significa que todos los ciudadanos estadounidenses que residen en Puerto Rico serán ciudadanos de los Estados Unidos y tendrán todos los derechos y obligaciones de los ciudadanos de los Estados Unidos.

Independencia: Prefiero que Puerto Rico sea una nación soberana e independiente, libre de cualquier relación con los Estados Unidos.

Estado Libre Asociado Soberano: Prefiero que Puerto Rico alcance su estatus libre de la Unión Americana y se convierta en un Estado Libre Asociado Soberano, libre de cualquier relación con los Estados Unidos.

responsabilidad descolonizadora. Ignorar la voluntad de los puertorriqueños expresada en las urnas significaría para Estados Unidos el descrédito a sus pretensiones de ser los defensores de la democracia en el mundo.

Sólo los colonialistas promueven la intamia y la vereüenza del voto por el Sí. el voto para perpetuar la colonia. Con el Sí, Puerto Rico pierde. Deniera más aue ser colonia, querer serlo.

Cualquier anticolonialista que participe en las elecciones y que se abstenga de votar por el NO contribuye al triunfo de la colonia porque su inacción aumenta el porcentaje de votos por el SÍ. Negarse a votar NO a la colonia equivale a votar por la colonia. Y para los que proponen como única solución al problema del estatus una potencial Asamblea Constitucional, el triunfo del NO garantiza que la misma no se convierta -de concretarse en el futuro- en mecanismo para perpetuar el colonialismo como pretenden los colonialistas.

III. La suprema definición

El proceso de descolonización se profundiza con la segunda pregunta. Marcará el inicio de la suprema definición -yanquis o puertorriqueños- que hemos predicado por años. Ese proceso comienza pero no termina ese día. Lo crucial es cómo termina.

Los independentistas votaremos por la independencia para afirmar el derecho inalienable a la libertad de nuestra patria.

Si los que no somos estadistas votamos por la opción de nuestra preferencia -nosotros por la independencia y los otros por el ELA Soberano- la estadidad saldrá maltrecha y nuestro futuro como nación latinoamericana saldrá fortalecido. Mientras mayor sea el voto por la independencia más cercano estará ese futuro y más efectivo será el poder de veto de la independencia contra la estadidad.

Pero aún si la estadidad resultara favorecida, luego de la consulta surgirán las insalvables contradicciones que tendrá que enfrentar esa opción por ser contraria a los intereses nacionales de Estados Unidos y a los de Puerto Rico. Los puertorriqueños no estamos dispuestos a renunciar a nuestra nacionalidad ni Estados Unidos a convertirse en un estado multinacional.

IV. La ruta está trazada

No se puede brevalecer rehuendo el combate. Hay que definirse ahora.

El ELA colonial ha sido el instrumento más efectivo para adelantar la estadidad.

La ruta está trazada. En la primera pregunta, hay que derrotar la colonia mediante un gran consenso entre independentistas, estadistas y populares que postulan un ELA no colonial y no territorial. En la segunda, cada cual votará por el estatus de su preferencia y comenzará la suprema definición. En ese proceso las alternativas ilusorias o inviables quedarán descartadas, los Estados Unidos tendrá que enfrentar su responsabilidad y nuestro pueblo encontrará su cauce.

Para impulsar la descolonización y adelantar la independencia los independentistas votaremos NO a la colonia en la primera pregunta. En la segunda, con nuestro voto, proclamaremos ante el mundo entero

VIVA PUERTO RICO



ANUNCIO POLÍTICO PAGADO POR EL PIP

(Source: Berríos Martínez, 2012)

10.7 Conmemorando el Grito de Lares 2007: Frases a Lares

SEPTIEMBRE 2007

Conmemorando El Grito de Lares 2007 FRASES A LARES

"Ciudad del Grito"
 "Lares es la consagración de la Nación"
 "A Lares se entra de rodillas porque es el altar de la Patria"
 "La Ciudad del Grito y la Meca de Puerto Rico"
 "Altar de la Patria"
 "El pueblo de las mujeres bellas"
 "Lares, la Capital de la montaña"
 "Ciudad de los poetas"
 "Ciudad de la montaña"
 "Lares, un pueblo del futuro"
 "Ciudad de los cielos abiertos"


Las frases no son tradiciones, son palabras para exaltar por uso y costumbre.

no Lares son las palabras en Sept 2007 en municipal plaza

"Ciudad de los cielos abiertos"

Quien lleva las palabras puestas en un semicírculo es el escudo de armas que dice "Lares, Ciudad del Grito", lo que constituye el sello de Lares e identifica nuestro pueblo. Pero Lares se le conoce con diferentes frases, no existe una en particular. Así que ha sido muy acertada la frase "Ciudad de los cielos abiertos" para recibir a nuestros visitantes, la cual quedará para nuestra historia por el Hon. Roberto Pagán Centeno, Alcalde.

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FOTO: ROBERTO PAGÁN CENTENO

(Source: *Surcos Lareños*, 2007)

10.8 Sample of written response from William Miranda Torres

MUNICIPIO AUTÓNOMO DE CAGUAS
OFICINA DEL ALCALDE

de servicios médicos avanzados, turismo religioso, turismo ecológico, entre otros, para Caguas y la Región Centro Oriental.

¿Me puede explicar su posición en torno al debate del estatus políticos?

En este asunto del estatus, coincidimos con las posturas soberanistas enunciadas por mi padre William Miranda Marín. Los partidos políticos necesitan una renovación de sus programas y postulados ideológicos. Los bloques comerciales creados en los últimos veinte años en Europa, Norteamérica y Asia, las nuevas regulaciones en todos los órdenes internacionales, inciden en los intercambios comerciales y financieros; y la entrada de países emergentes como China, India y Brasil, ha cambiado el mundo. Eso lo vemos cada día con simplemente hacer compra en el supermercado, la ferretería y la tienda por departamentos. Las nuevas tecnologías impulsan una revolución cultural y a vivir ejerciendo una verdadera democracia. Esto es cada vez más importante para añadir valor y derechos humanos. A esto se suma el mayor reto de la humanidad que es el cambio climático, la crisis energética y alimentaria. En ese escenario las ciudades asumen nuevos roles en sus relaciones internacionales, así como en la formulaciones de iniciativas de desarrollo local. Pienso que las nuevas formulaciones y propuestas en torno a las relaciones entre Puerto Rico y Estados Unidos (EEUU) deben ir dirigidas a atender estos asuntos principalmente. Mi postura es que el estatus debe trabajarse mediante una asamblea constitucional en la que todas las ideologías tengan representación. Ese resultado es el que debemos llevar a los Estados Unidos para establecer las posteriores acciones para lograr establecer una relación de dignidad entre ambos países. Lamentablemente, los partidos políticos en Puerto Rico siguen con retóricas promoviendo el asistencialismo. El status no

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Letter's debate is dominated by "soberanismo" (sovereignty)

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(Source: Miranda Torres, 2011)

10.9 Sample of legislative session: Guaynabo

Sesión ordinaria

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24 de febrero de 2011

Hon. Presidente: Con catorce votos a favor el Proyecto de Ordenanza Núm. 107, Serie 2001-2011, queda aprobado.

Hon. Miguel Negron: Que nuestra señora Secretaria proceda con la lectura del Proyecto de Resolución Núm. 20.

Hon. Presidente: Se procede con la lectura del Proyecto de Resolución Num. 20.

Proyectos Resolución

Proyecto de Resolución Núm. 21, Serie 2010-2011 (21)
Presentado por: Administración

PARA EXPRESAR NUESTRO MAS ENERGETICO RECHAZO Y REPUDIO A LAS MALICIOSAS E INJURIANTES EXPRESIONES DEL CONGRESISTA LUIS GUTIERREZ, QUE UTILIZANDO SU ESCAÑO EN LA CAMARA DE REPRESENTANTES FEDERAL, OFENDIO Y VEJO A TODOS LOS PUERTORRIQUEÑOS, INTENTANDO DENIGRAR A NUESTRO PUEBLO

Hon. Miguel Negron: Señor Presidente

Hon. Presidente: Hon. Portavoz

Hon. Miguel Negron: Para que se incluya a todos los miembros de la mayoría que expresamente pidieron ser incluidos

Moción para que se dé por leído el proyecto de Resolución Núm. 20, Serie 2010-2011, presentada por el Hon. Luis Carlos Maldonado Padilla

Hon. Presidente: Antes de presentar esa moción, se resuelve el asunto presentado por el Portavoz de la mayoría en relación a que se incluyan los miembros de la delegación de la mayoría de esta Legislatura Municipal por su nombre como coautores de la medida.

Moción para que se dé por leído el proyecto de Resolución Núm. 20, Serie 2010-2011, presentada por el Hon. Luis Carlos Maldonado Padilla, secundado por el Hon. Guillermo Urbina Machuca.

Hon. Presidente: Debidamente secundada, hay alguna objeción, no habiendo objeción, se da por leído el Proyecto de Resolución Núm. 20.

Hon. Luis Carlos Maldonado: Señor Presidente

Hon. Presidente: Hon. Luis Carlos Maldonado

Hon. Luis Carlos Maldonado: Antes de presentar la moción de que se apruebe el proyecto, quisiera presentar una enmienda al proyecto.

Hon. Presidente: En que consiste la enmienda

(Source: Gobierno Municipal Autónomo de Guaynabo, 2011)